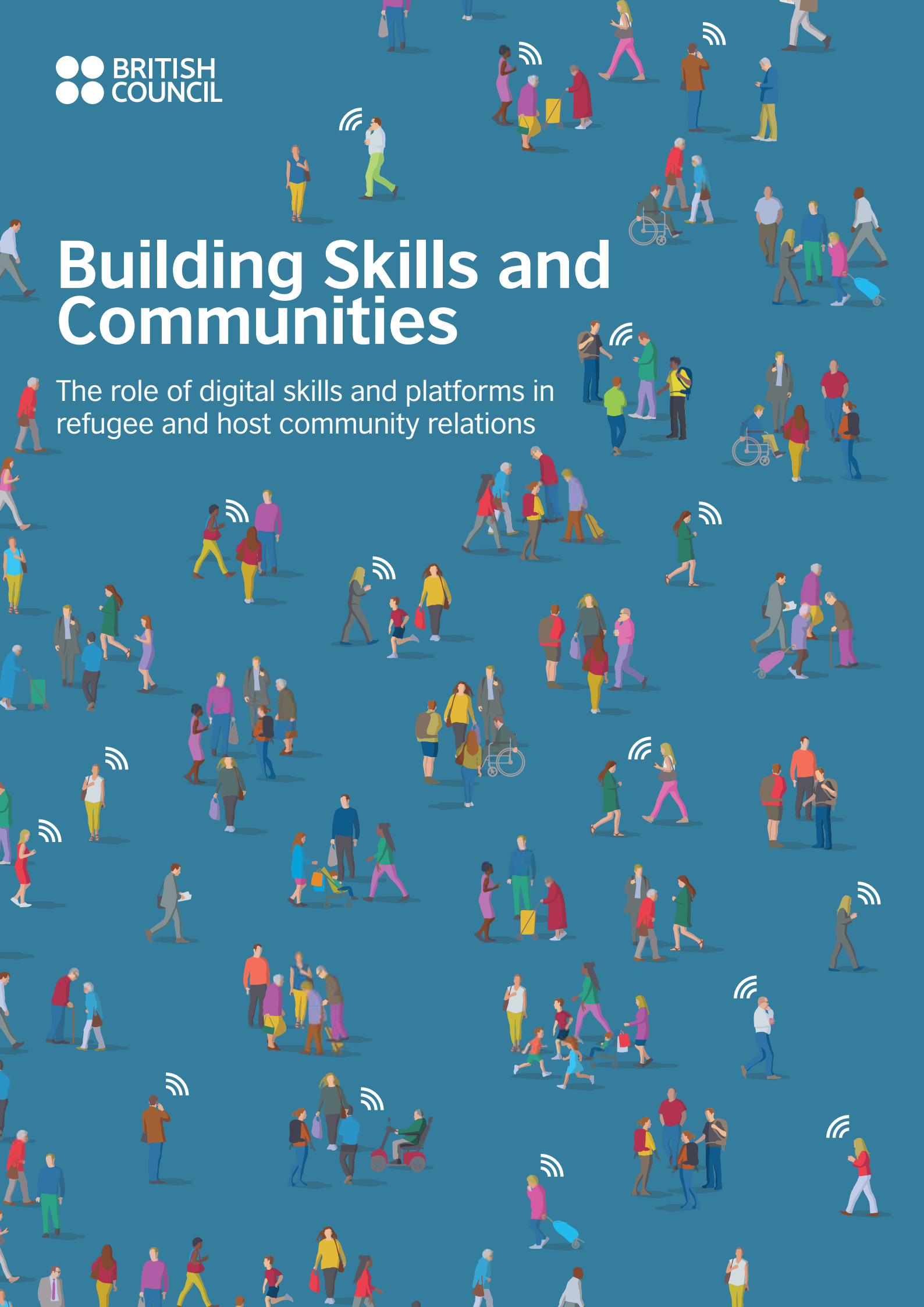


# Building Skills and Communities

The role of digital skills and platforms in  
refugee and host community relations



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# Foreword

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and education opportunities. Our research seeks to produce useful new knowledge and to increase our understanding of cultural relations and support solutions to shared challenges. Our research activity has the ability to improve our programmes and those of our partners, and inform the policy environment in order to contribute more to the people and communities that we work with, across the world.

The British Council has long and broad experience of building cultural relationships through education and skills across face-to-face interventions, digital and blended learning experiences and with universities and schools, civil society actors and cultural institutions. At the heart of our work is the exchange of friendly knowledge between individuals and communities, and in the spirit of mutuality, we seek to learn from those who we work with as well as share the insights that we gain.

We continue to work with people, civil society, cultural and educational institutions before conflicts displace people, during the troubles and after. Our relationships and presence often include both the countries of origin and the many destinations of people displaced by conflict. Our work extends to both those who have had to leave their country and find refuge in another, as well as with the local communities that already reside in the host countries. The relationship between refugees and host communities is important for both communities, whilst being equally complex and dependent on context. The friendship and acceptance of hosts can make all the difference to those who arrive fleeing danger. Refugees can hugely enrich host communities culturally, socially and economically. No community is monolithic and vulnerable communities in host societies may have unmet needs and can benefit from similar forms of assistance available to refugees. Education, practical skills, language learning and information sharing are especially important and can be used as an asset for both refugee and vulnerable host communities in bettering their own lives, the experiences of their communities and of others.

Achieving the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals to leave no one behind will require many dimensions of progress, including reducing inequality between and within countries and communities, and in particular those with mixed refugee and host populations. With 1% of humanity being refugees or displaced people, the inclusion of their experiences and challenges needs to be considered. This is not likely without increasing partnership, between governments and between people and civil societies. Cooperation requires and strengthens trust. Our research on trust indicates that the qualities which most strongly drive trust between large countries include openness, contribution to development, working constructively with other governments and treating people fairly.

Grand challenges, aspirations and adversity are spurs to innovation. Throughout this report, case studies of numerous digital initiatives across Germany, Lebanon and Turkey highlight exactly this. In light of challenges ranging from external policy restrictions, limited funding opportunities and how to best engage with the diverse needs of these communities, innovative ways are being found to harness digital skills and platforms as a methodology, vehicle and focus to support the advancement of refugee and local communities, whilst directly and indirectly bringing them together to support mutual understanding and friendly knowledge. Utilising digital skills and platforms for refugees and local host communities may stimulate creativity and learning that can help share know-how, build human capital and make people better connected across environments.

The potential network effects and scale of digital platforms and their abilities are radically different from those of a decade ago and are continuously changing with social consequences that are still unknown. It is important that we seek to better understand what works, including learning quickly from what works less well, and become faster at spreading positive practices. In this context of rapid change and increased demand, we will need to continue to reflect, to be curious and listen carefully to both providers and beneficiaries to what the people experiencing these communities tell us, if we hope to satisfy our impatience for better outcomes.

**Dan Shah**

Director, Research and Policy Insight  
British Council

# Executive summary

## Overview and objectives

Numerous political, economic and social events around the world have sparked unparalleled movement of people across the world.<sup>1</sup> This level of migration presents challenges for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into host communities.<sup>2 3 4</sup> As set out in the foreword, the British Council believe that refugees should have the strongest possible opportunities for being treated well and equally and have meaningful opportunities for integration during their time in refuge. State and non-state actors, international and national institutions, as well as local NGOs are finding innovative ways to tackle these challenges, support refugees' educational and professional journeys, and alleviate tensions between host communities and refugees. Following the UNHCR definition, this report defines a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence.<sup>5</sup>

There has been a great deal of interest in using technology to support the integration of refugees.<sup>6</sup> In this context, the research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on how digital platforms and skills can contribute to social cohesion between refugees and host communities, and to support the development, delivery and effectiveness of digital initiatives in this sector, including those developed and designed by the British Council.

The study is guided by the following

### research questions (RQ):

- **RQ1:** What digital platforms and digital skills are being utilised that have the ability to create, foster and adapt spaces (which can be both physical and virtual) for refugees and host communities for community building and social cohesion?
- **RQ2:** In what ways are digital platforms and digital skills able to support or restrict social cohesion and community building between refugees and host communities?
- **RQ3:** What are the key factors that can increase or restrict these initiatives' ability to achieve positive outcomes?

## Methodology

To answer the research questions, the research team has drawn on a review of the global academic and grey literature and primary research on digital initiatives in **Germany, Lebanon and Turkey**.<sup>7</sup> A number of case studies were mapped and selected for in-depth review, and investigated based on a review of programme documentation and interviews with key stakeholders.

<sup>1</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Figures at a glance. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

<sup>2</sup>Chemin, E.J., Hess, S., Nagel, K.A., Kasperek, B.H., Hansel, V. and Jakubowski, M. (2018). Germany country report: legal & policy framework of migration governance. Available at: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1248277/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Amreasha, J. (2018). Lebanon country report: legal & policy framework of migration governance. Available at: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1248413/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>Elif, Ç., Neva, Ö., Ela, G.N. and Zeynep, Ş.M. (2018). Turkey country report: legal & policy framework of migration governance. Available at: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1248427/FULLTEXT02.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). What is a refugee? Available at: [www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/](http://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/).

<sup>6</sup>Benton, M. and Glennie, A. (2016). Digital humanitarianism: how tech entrepreneurs are supporting refugees integration. Migration Policy Institute. Available at: <https://migrationpolicy.org/research/digital-humanitarianism-how-tech-entrepreneurs-are-supporting-refugee-integration>.

<sup>7</sup>In Europe, Germany hosts the highest number of asylum seekers and refugees, whereas Turkey is currently hosting the highest number of refugees worldwide with figures totalling to approximately 4 million refugees. In Lebanon, the numbers are also extremely high, with one quarter of the population holding refugee status.

## Context

We conceptualise **social cohesion** as the ultimate aim of two-way social integration that, in the refugee context, describes the process by which refugees and host communities engage, negotiate cultural differences and can resolve conflict. Following Ager and Strang's<sup>8</sup> categorisation, we have identified four key domains that constitute the process of social integration:

- **Means and markers:** employment, education, housing and health.
- **Social connections:** connections within a community, connections with members of other communities and connections with institutions.
- **Facilitators:** language, information and cultural knowledge, safety and security.
- **Foundations:** citizenship and rights.

Advancements in each of these domains – all interconnected – support improved social cohesion. The opportunity for, and obstacles to, advancements in these domains are strongly affected by context and national policy.<sup>9</sup> Whilst Germany, Lebanon and Turkey differ significantly in their approach to managing and processing refugee and asylum seeker experiences and claims, a few common obstacles to social cohesion have been demonstrated by a wide body of research, as follows:<sup>10 11 12</sup>

| Domain             | Key obstacles   |
|--------------------|---|
| Means and markers  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour market restrictions</li> <li>• Limited educational opportunities</li> </ul> |
| Social connections | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative public opinion</li> </ul>   |
| Facilitators       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not speaking the local language</li> <li>• Lack of information</li> </ul>          |
| Foundation         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal challenges</li> </ul>  |

Digital initiatives have the potential to support social cohesion by addressing some of these obstacles. We discuss this in further detail under each research question:

***RQ1: What digital platforms and digital skills are being utilised that have the ability to create, foster and adapt spaces (which can be both physical and virtual) for refugees and host communities for community building and social cohesion?***

Digital initiatives covered by this study have been defined as follows:

- **Digital platforms** can include mobile apps, websites, formal and informal online education platforms, digital newspapers and blogs, digital games, e-commerce platforms and digital forums and spaces for communication and networking (e.g. social media, chatrooms).
- **Digital skills** include information and technology skills such as analytics, coding, social media, digital news literacy, search engine and content marketing, word processing skills and web design.

We have mapped key digital initiatives that, in the three countries under study, have the potential to promote social cohesion, through the key domains of Ager and Strang's social integration framework. This includes 29 initiatives in Germany, 15 initiatives in Lebanon and 15 initiatives in Turkey, considering both digital platforms and digital skills providers. Based on the mapping, we have selected a sample to explore in depth, in order to address RQ2.

<sup>8</sup> Home Office. (2004). Indicators of integration: a final report. Available at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218141321/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/dpr28.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Phillimore, J. and Goodson, L. (2006). Problem or opportunity? Asylum seekers, refugees, employment and social exclusion in deprived urban areas. *Urban Studies*, 43(10), pp. 1715–1736.

<sup>11</sup> Mestheneos, E. and Ioannidi, E. (2002). Obstacles to refugee integration in the European Union member states. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 15(3), pp. 304–320.

<sup>12</sup> Newmana, A., Bimroseb, J., Nielsenc I. and Zacher H. (2018). Vocational behavior of refugees: how do refugees seek employment, overcome work-related challenges, and navigate their careers? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 105, pp. 1–5.

*RQ2: In what ways are digital platforms and digital skills able to support or restrict social cohesion and community building between refugees and host communities?*

The digital nature of these initiatives offers a number of practical advantages, which have been recognised as a way to foster social inclusion of disadvantaged groups in general, beyond the refugee context.<sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> The main advantages are the following: digital initiatives can be **accessed** more widely by users than being solely dependent on face-to-face interaction; they can **quickly** and **cost-efficiently** reach a wide audience of users; users can easily identify and select information and services that **fit their specific needs**; digital initiatives provide information and content that can be updated in **real time**; finally, **digital skills** are an important tool, with a wide range of applications and high demand in an ever changing job market.

On this basis, digital initiatives have the potential to address the main obstacles to social cohesion, as follows:

- **Means and markers:** By increasing access to education, employment and housing opportunities, as well as health services, digital initiatives foster social cohesion. They improve refugees' sense of agency, psychosocial wellbeing, social networks and socio-economic status.
- **Social connections:** Digital initiatives can increase refugees' opportunities to interact with each other and with members of the host community, and build networks and communities online and offline.

- **Facilitators:** Digital initiatives can support language learning, provide clear, updated, and often multilingual information on a range of topics, as well as increased opportunities for cultural exchange.
- **Foundations:** Digital initiatives are helping refugees and asylum seekers gain awareness of their rights, speak up about their experiences and mobilise support from a wider audience.

The research has also identified some **negative outcomes and limitations** that can restrict the ability of digital initiatives to promote social cohesion between refugees and host communities. Potential negative outcomes and limitations include increasing exclusion and competition with host community members; reducing refugees' incentive to interact and bond with the host community, because of the easier communication with their home country; and widening inequalities between refugee groups. Digital initiatives alone are also limited in their ability to overcome restrictive legal and labour market regulations, and negative attitudes of the host society. **Blended models of learning and opportunities**, combining digital and non-digital means, are often preferred and more effective to achieve social cohesion outcomes.

We acknowledge and understand that digital methodologies and initiatives alone are not able to achieve positive outcomes related to social integration and cohesion. However, the research highlights the role that digital methodologies and initiatives have in supporting and contributing to these outcomes.

<sup>13</sup> Mervyn, K., Simon, A. and Allen, D. (2014). Digital inclusion and social inclusion: a tale of two cities. *Information Communication and Society*, 17(9), pp. 1086–1104.

<sup>14</sup> Cantabrana, J.L.L., Minguell, M.E. and Tedesco, J.C. (2015). Inclusion and social cohesion in a digital society. *RUSC Universities and Knowledge Society Journal*, 12(2), pp. 44–58.



*RQ3: What are the key factors that can increase or restrict these initiatives' ability to achieve positive outcomes?*

We have identified a series of factors that can enable digital initiatives to grow and consolidate, mitigate the limitations and potential negative outcomes previously identified, and support positive social cohesion outcomes. On this basis, these are our main recommendations.

- 1. Digital initiatives should be responsive to users' needs,** listening to and incorporating the specific needs of their target group(s), and actively involving refugees in the design and development of the initiatives.
- 2. Digital initiatives should include both refugees and host communities,** and provide both with opportunities to engage and participate.
- 3. Digital initiatives should build partnerships and diversify sources of funding to achieve sustainability,** and be able to grow, consolidate and achieve long-lasting outcomes in terms of social cohesion.
- 4. Policymakers should explore how to take optimal advantage of the new opportunities that are being offered by digital initiatives in terms of social cohesion,** by promoting an enabling legal and financial environment, and increasing refugees' access to digital technologies.

## Conclusions

We believe that refugees and asylum seekers should have equal opportunities to participate as fully as possible in the host country and be equipped with the skills, knowledge and access in order to do so. Our findings have demonstrated that digital initiatives have the ability to provide refugees with increased opportunities for social integration and, consequently, they can foster social cohesion.

Digital initiatives offer numerous advantages compared to non-digital initiatives, as mentioned above. However, digital initiatives also have some limitations. For education and learning, blended learning and opportunities are preferred, as demonstrated in the findings and in other research.

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## List of Acronyms

|              |  |                 |  |
|--------------|--|-----------------|--|
| <b>AUB</b>   | American University of Beirut  | <b>LFIP</b>     | Law on Foreigners and International Protection                                 |
| <b>BAMF</b>  | Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees) | <b>LOST</b>     | Lebanese Organisation for Studies and Training                                 |
| <b>BC</b>    | British Council  | <b>MEHE</b>     | Ministry of Education and Higher Education                                     |
| <b>BIBB</b>  | Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (German)                           | <b>MOOC</b>     | Massive Online Open Course   |
| <b>BMBF</b>  | Federal Ministry of Education and Research (German)  | <b>MOSA</b>     | Ministry of Social Affairs (Lebanon)   |
| <b>BMI</b>   | Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (German)                          | <b>NGO</b>      | Non-governmental Organisation  |
| <b>BOT</b>   | Bridge, Outsource, Transform   | <b>ODT</b>      | Organisational Digital Transformation  |
| <b>CEAS</b>  | Common European Asylum System  | <b>PADILEIA</b> | Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access                          |
| <b>COC</b>   | Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce  | <b>STEM</b>     | Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics                                  |
| <b>CV</b>    | Curriculum Vitae   | <b>TPR</b>      | Temporary Protection Regulation  |
| <b>DGMM</b>  | Directorate General of Migration Management  | <b>UK</b>       | United Kingdom   |
| <b>DOT</b>   | Digital Opportunity Trust  | <b>UN</b>       | United Nations   |
| <b>DPRA</b>  | Department of Political and Refugee Affairs  | <b>UNESCO</b>   | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization               |
| <b>EBRD</b>  | European Bank of Reconstruction and Development  | <b>UNHCR</b>    | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                                  |
| <b>ULYP</b>  | Unite Lebanon Youth Project  | <b>UNRWA</b>    | United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East |
| <b>ECHR</b>  | European Convention on Human Rights  | <b>VET</b>      | Vocational Education and Training  |
| <b>EU</b>    | European Union   | <b>WFP</b>      | World Food Programme   |
| <b>FDL</b>   | Free Digital Learning  |                 |  |
| <b>FGD</b>   | Focus Group Discussion   |                 |  |
| <b>GPS</b>   | Global Positioning System  |                 |  |
| <b>GDPR</b>  | General Data Protection Regulation   |                 |  |
| <b>GSO</b>   | General Security   |                 |  |
| <b>HOPES</b> | Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians                    |                 |  |
| <b>ICT</b>   | Information and Communications Technology  |                 |  |
| <b>ISKUR</b> | Turkish Employment Agency  |                 |  |
| <b>IT</b>    | Information Technology   |                 |  |
| <b>KII</b>   | Key Informant Interview  |                 |  |

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

Numerous political, economic and social events around the world have sparked unparalleled movement of people across the world. As of 2019, 68 million people worldwide are displaced within and across borders.<sup>15</sup> This level of migration presents challenges for the integration of asylum seekers and refugees into host communities.<sup>16 17 18</sup>

As set out in the foreword, the British Council believe that refugees should have the strongest possible opportunities for being treated well and equally and have meaningful opportunities for integration during their time in refuge. Following the UNHCR definition, this report defines a refugee as someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence, and has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group.<sup>19</sup> Our study does not include internally displaced persons, due to case study contexts.

State and non-state actors, international and national institutions and NGOs are finding innovative ways to tackle these challenges, support refugees' educational and professional journeys and alleviate tensions between host communities and refugees. The scale of the challenges means that opportunities and resources in the offline sphere are unlikely to meet demand. For this reason, there has been a great deal of interest in using technology to support the integration of refugees. The 2015–2016 period has seen an increasing amount of social and technological innovation to address the European refugee crisis.<sup>20</sup> This includes platforms enabling both refugees and host communities to access education opportunities, utilising digital platforms and technology to support local integration, and supporting the development of digital skills to increase employability.

<sup>15</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Figures at a glance. Available at: <https://unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

<sup>16</sup>Chemin, E.J., Hess, S., Nagel, K.A., Kasperek, B.H., Hansel, V. and Jakubowski, M. (2018). Germany country report: legal & policy framework of migration governance. Available at: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1248277/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup>Amreessa, J. (2018). Lebanon country report: legal & policy framework of migration governance. Available at: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1248413/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup>Elif, Ç., Neva, Ö., Ela G.N. and Zeynep, Ş.M. (2018). Turkey country report: legal & policy framework of migration governance. Available at: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1248427/FULLTEXT02.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). What is a refugee? Available at: <https://unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>.

<sup>20</sup>Benton, M. and Glennie, A. (2016). Digital humanitarianism: how tech entrepreneurs are supporting refugees integration. Migration Policy Institute. Available at: <https://migrationpolicy.org/research/digital-humanitarianism-how-tech-entrepreneurs-are-supporting-refugee-integration>.

## 1.2 Objectives of the research

In this context, the research aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on how digital platforms and skills can foster social cohesion between refugees and host communities. Research has been conducted on the role of digital initiatives to promote social cohesion and integration of refugees and other displaced people.<sup>21</sup> However, to date there has been limited research into the experiences of different groups of refugees and asylum seekers, and the specific advantages of technology and digital skills for their integration.<sup>22</sup> On this basis, this research investigates the **role of digital platforms and digital skills** in facilitating **community building** and **social cohesion** between refugees and host communities. The study is guided by the following **research questions (RQ)**:

- **RQ1:** What digital platforms and digital skills are being utilised that have the ability to create, foster and adapt spaces (which can be both physical and virtual) for refugees and host communities for community building and social cohesion?
- **RQ2:** In what ways are digital platforms and digital skills able to support or restrict social cohesion and community building between refugees and host communities?
- **RQ3:** What are the key factors that can increase or restrict these initiatives' ability to achieve positive outcomes?

To answer the research questions, the research team has drawn on a review of the global academic and grey literature and primary research on digital initiatives in **Germany, Lebanon and Turkey**.<sup>23</sup>

## 1.3 Structure of the report

The report is structured as follows:

**Section 2** introduces the methodology of the research, the data collection methods, the selection of case studies and the key limitations.

**Sections 3 and 4** discuss the first two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2). In particular, Section 3 sets out our conceptualisation of the key terms of the study, and Section 4 discusses findings from our primary fieldwork in Germany, Turkey and Lebanon.

**Section 5** addresses the final research question (RQ3), presenting the key factors that can enable or restrain digital initiatives to grow and consolidate, and promote or restrict social cohesion between refugees and host communities as a result.

**Section 6** concludes and provides a set of recommendations for consideration.

**Annex A** sets out a mapping of digital initiatives in the three countries, including those selected for in-depth review.

<sup>21</sup>Latonero, M. and Kittf, P. (2018). On digital passages and borders: refugees and the new infrastructure for movement and control. *Social Media + Society*, 4(1), pp. 1–11.

<sup>22</sup>Zewdie, N.W. (2017). IT strategies considerations regarding refugees and asylum seekers: a study of digital practices among Asylum seekers in Umea, Sweden. Master's thesis, Umea University. Available at: <https://umu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1078561/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup>In Europe, Germany hosts the highest number of asylum seekers and refugees, whereas Turkey is currently hosting the highest number of refugees worldwide with figures totalling to approximately 4 million refugees. In Lebanon, the numbers are also extremely high, with one quarter of the population holding refugee status.

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Research questions and methods

The research took a multi-faceted approach. The table below sets out the three research questions, mapped to the relevant methods, which are discussed in further detail in the following sub-sections.

**Table 1: Research questions mapped to method**

| Research Question  | Literature review | Mapping of initiatives | Case study of selected initiatives |
|--|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>RQ1:</b> What digital platforms and digital skills are being utilised that have the ability to create, foster and adapt spaces (which can be both physical and virtual) for refugees and host communities for community building and social cohesion? | ✓                 | ✓                      | ✓                                  |
| <b>RQ2:</b> In what ways are digital platforms and digital skills able to support or restrict social cohesion and community building between refugees and host communities?  | ✓                 | ✓                      | ✓                                  |
| <b>RQ3:</b> What are the key factors that can increase or restrict these initiatives' ability to achieve positive outcomes?  | ✓                 | ✓                      | ✓                                  |

#### Literature review

We first conducted a literature review, exploring the wider academic and grey literature, as well as policy documents, to understand the conceptualisations of the key terms, and the links between digital platforms and digital skills and social cohesion. We drew our definitions from the literature in the field of refugee integration and digitalisation, with a focus on the definitions used to inform the British Council's work. The literature review was used to develop a conceptual framework, drawing on defined categories and typologies, in order to theoretically ground our fieldwork, and to focus on addressing key knowledge gaps.

#### Mapping of digital initiatives

We then undertook a mapping of the key digital platforms and skills programmes in the countries of interest (Germany, Turkey and Lebanon), categorised using the framework and typologies identified in section 3.2.1. The full mapping is set out in Annex A. The mapping provided us with a useful overview of the digital initiatives in the three countries.

This mapping was then used to select a number of case studies for in-depth review. The selection of the case studies has been done in coordination with the British Council, according to the following criteria: initiatives operating in **urban areas**; initiatives that are **still operating**; and initiatives **willing to participate** in the study. We also ensured that in the overall selection there was a good mix of initiatives, which enabled: covering a **wide range** of sectors and fields; including

at least one initiative from the **British Council**; including at least one initiative that is **comparable across the countries** under study; covering both **well established** and **grassroots** initiatives; and covering initiatives that include refugees as both **users and providers**.

The table sets out the selected case studies:

**Table 2: Selected case studies**

| Country | Initiative  | Focus area  |
|---------|---|-------------|
| Germany | Eed be Eed  | Information |
|         | Kiron   | Education   |
|         | ReDI: School of Digital Integration                                     | Education   |
|         | Yallah Deutschland  | Information |
| Lebanon | Anti-Racist Movement  | Advocacy    |
|         | Aswat Faeela/Active Voices  | Advocacy    |
|         | Digital Opportunity Trust   | Employment  |
|         | Kiron   | Education   |
|         | World Food Programme/<br>American University of Beirut                  | Education   |
| Turkey  | Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians | Education   |
|         | Gherbetna   | Employment  |
|         | I'mappy   | Information |
|         | Taalum  | Employment  |

## Case study of selected initiatives

Case study work involved a review of programme documentation and fieldwork conducted by our country experts in Germany, Lebanon and Turkey. The country experts conducted key informant interviews (KIs) with providers of selected digital platforms, and either focus group discussions (FGDs) or one-to-one interviews with refugee/host community users of the platforms, depending on the context and time availability. Sampling of respondents within each case study was drawn from the target population of the initiative. Where the host community was involved as provider or user, we also sought to interview them. Per case study, we conducted an average of three to four one-to-one interviews with providers and

users, and one FGD, when feasible. The British Council then presented and tested emerging findings at the 2019 Going Global conference, and received feedback from a number of stakeholders.

## Analysis

Our analysis was based on the conceptual framework developed from a review of the literature, and against the three research questions. The conceptual framework helped us frame the case study analysis, identify key social cohesion and integration outcomes, and identify factors supporting the success of these initiatives. It also helped us form recommendations on how future initiatives could potentially be adapted to strengthen social cohesion and integration outcomes.

## 2.2 Limitations

When reviewing the findings, the following limitations should be borne in mind:

**Table 3: Main limitations of the study**

| Limitation   | How this has been addressed   |
|--|---|
| Due to time restrictions, the selection of the case studies depended on the responses and availability of providers, which might have led us to exclude interesting examples of digital initiatives.   | Our selection of case studies was led by the aim of ensuring diversity and representativeness across the three countries under study.   |
| Interviews with users of digital initiatives, from both refugees and host communities, were not always possible. Moreover, we interviewed participants who were available, namely those without pressing limitations in terms of time, mobility and childcare responsibilities. This could have limited the breadth of the perspectives collected. | We achieved a gender balance in our respondents' selection. We also offered compensation for travel, in an attempt to ease some of the barriers to participation. In addition, presenting the emerging findings at the 2019 Going Global conference has enabled us to collect additional feedback from programme representatives. |
| Most of the digital initiatives covered by our research and grey literature are at an early stage of development, which means that the outcomes in terms of social cohesion are more hypothesised than actual, as in most cases they have not had enough time to materialise.  | We explored the theoretical mechanisms through which digital initiatives could lead to increased social cohesion, and reported on a number of factors that users and providers of these initiatives have identified as relevant to the topic.   |
| Most of the initiatives that we covered primarily target Syrian refugees, which might have limited the breadth of the insights that we gathered, especially in terms of the specific needs of different refugee groups.  | We managed to interview refugees from different nationalities (mainly Iraqis) in a few cases. However, this can also reflect the target focus of most of the existing digital initiatives, rather than a limitation of our study per se.  |



# 3.0 Conceptual framework

## 3.1 Introduction

This section serves two purposes. We first set out our conceptualisation of social cohesion and social integration (section 3.1), and then discuss obstacles to achieve social cohesion (section 3.2). Section 3.3 provides definitions and the scope of our review in terms of digital platforms and digital skills. Section 3.4 explores RQ1 and RQ2 on a theoretical level, in terms of how digital platforms and skills can support or restrict social integration and social cohesion, and what the key knowledge gaps are in this sense.

## 3.2 Social cohesion and social integration

This section defines the key term of social cohesion, and the related concept of social integration.

### Conceptualisation of social cohesion and social integration

There is no broad consensus on the definition of social cohesion. However, it is generally perceived as the bonds and glue that keep all population segments together,<sup>24</sup> ensuring the respect of societal and cultural diversity.<sup>25</sup> A socially cohesive society is characterised

by high levels of trust, connectedness and solidarity among its members,<sup>26</sup> and is less prone to slip into destructive patterns of tension and conflict when different interests collide.<sup>27</sup> Social cohesion is therefore conducive to stability, helping societies to function effectively and fairly.<sup>28</sup> Social cohesion is linked to community building, and can reduce inequalities, maximise inclusion and strengthen social relations,<sup>29 30</sup> through exchanges and networks between individuals and communities, and integrating people into civil society.<sup>31</sup>

In the refugee context, social cohesion is directly related to the concept of **social integration**, which is also highly debated and contested, depending on what is expected of refugees and host communities.<sup>32 33 34</sup> In this report, social integration is understood as a two-way process that requires active engagement from both the newcomers and the host community, to ensure that refugees have access to jobs, education, housing, health, culture and language, to negotiate cultural differences and resolve conflict.<sup>35</sup> A two-way process recognises and embraces the social and cultural diversity of refugee populations<sup>36</sup> and aids refugees' participation in civil society.<sup>37</sup> By social integration, this report refers to supporting the integration of

<sup>24</sup>Mulunga, S.N. and Yazdanifard, R. (2014). Review of social inclusion, social cohesion and social capital in modern organization. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, 14(3), pp. 15–20.

<sup>25</sup>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). Social inclusion. Available at: <https://un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/issues/social-integration.html>

<sup>26</sup>Mulunga and Yazdanifard. Review of social inclusion, social cohesion and social capital.

<sup>27</sup>UNDESA. Social inclusion.

<sup>28</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. (2017). Understanding the role of ICTs in promoting social inclusion: the case of Syrian refugees in Germany. European Conference on Information Systems, Portugal. Available at: [https://aiselaisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1114&context=ecis2017\\_rp](https://aiselaisnet.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1114&context=ecis2017_rp).

<sup>29</sup>British Council. (2018). Language for resilience. Cross-disciplinary perspectives on the role of language in enhancing the resilience of refugees and host communities. Available at: [https://britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language\\_for\\_resilience\\_-\\_cross-disciplinary\\_perspectives\\_0.pdf](https://britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/language_for_resilience_-_cross-disciplinary_perspectives_0.pdf).

<sup>30</sup>Waddell, G. and Burton, K. (2006). *Is work good for your health and well-being?* London: The Stationery Office.

<sup>31</sup>Legère, K. and Rosendal, T. (2015). National languages, English and social cohesion in East Africa. In *Language and social cohesion: An introduction and lessons learnt*. London: British Council.

<sup>32</sup>UNDESA. Social inclusion.

<sup>33</sup>Alencar, A. (2017). Refugee integration and social media: a local and experiential perspective. *Information, Communication and Society*, 21(11), pp. 1588–1603.

<sup>34</sup>Home Office. (2004). Indicators of integration: a final report. Available at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110218141321/http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/dpr28.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

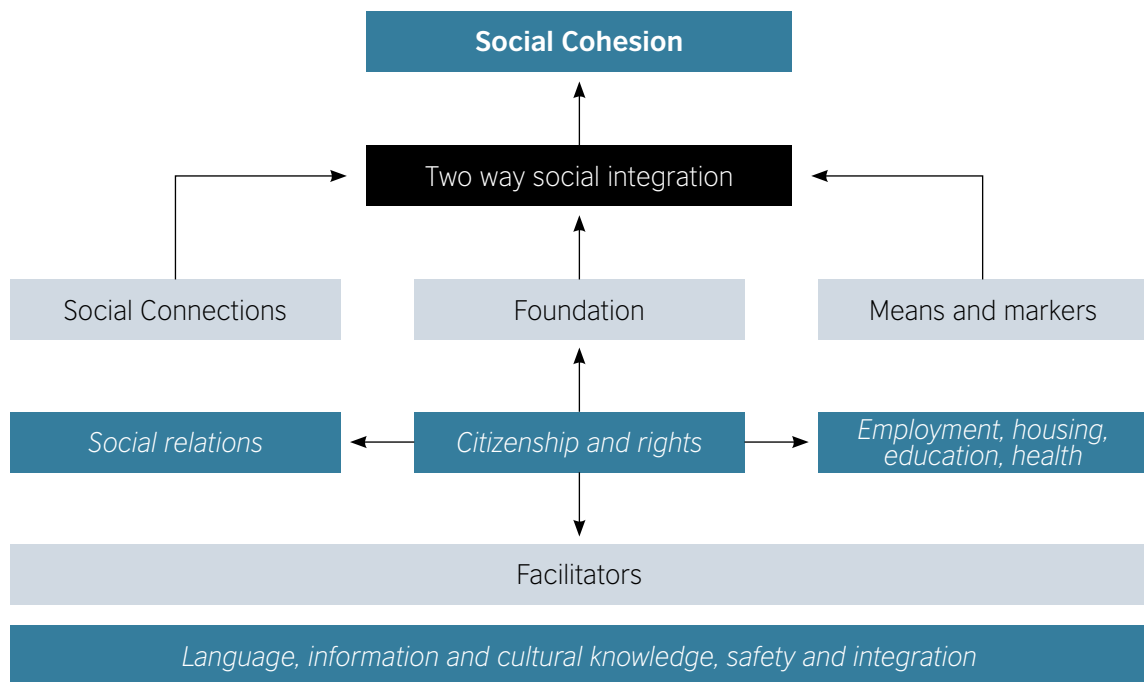
<sup>36</sup>UNDESA. Social inclusion.

<sup>37</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.

refugees in their time of refuge by supporting their social, educational and professional integration and allowing them to take part in the social domain, as opposed to the permanent settlement and integration of refugees and asylum seekers, which is a contested topic in numerous countries.

Figure 1 below sets out our conceptualisation of social cohesion and social integration. Social cohesion is understood as the end goal, while social integration is thought of as an ongoing process leading to this goal. Each term and the links between them are discussed in further detail below.

**Figure 1: Conceptualisation of social cohesion and social integration**



Ager and Strang<sup>38</sup> set out a framework to understand the different components of the process of social integration, which the authors frame as a two-way interaction.<sup>39</sup> Key domains of social integration, according to the framework, are as follows:

- **Means and markers:** employment, education, health, housing.
- **Social connections:** social relationships.
- **Facilitators:** language, cultural knowledge, information, safety and security.
- **Foundations:** citizenship and rights.

Ager and Strang<sup>40</sup> highlight the inter-linkages between these domains, all equally important to the process of social integration, and all influencing each other. Advancements in each of these domains can be seen as pathways to social cohesion. In particular,

establishing social connections with those of other national, ethnic or religious groupings is essential to establish the two-way integration process leading to social cohesion. Proximity and communication between members of a group, in particular, play a key role in fostering social cohesion, as this opens up opportunities for broadening cultural understanding, widens economic opportunities,<sup>41</sup> and enables issues to be resolved more easily among group members.<sup>42 43</sup> This is also important to counter stereotypes about 'the other'. The framework is explained in more detail in section 3.4.2, where we describe how digital initiatives can generate advancements in these dimensions, and in social cohesion as a result.

<sup>38</sup> Home Office. Indicators of integration.

<sup>39</sup> Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

<sup>40</sup> Home Office. Indicators of integration.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

<sup>43</sup> Mulunga and Yazdanifard. Review of social inclusion, social cohesion and social capital.

## Obstacles to social cohesion

Social support from the host society – which refers both to the policies of the host government and to the attitudes of the host community towards refugees and migration – is critical to each component of the framework, to achieve successful integration and social cohesion.<sup>44</sup> The lack of this support can generate obstacles to social cohesion,

which vary in different contexts and locations, depending on socio-economic as well as political factors.<sup>45 46 47</sup> The table below (Table 4) illustrates the most common obstacles identified by the literature, categorised according to Ager and Strang's<sup>48</sup> framework.

**Table 4: Key obstacles to social cohesion**

| Domain                    | Key obstacles   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Means and markers</b>  | <b>Labour market restrictions:</b> New arrivals either lack the skills required by the local labour market, or struggle to have educational qualifications and skills acquired abroad recognised in the host country. <sup>49</sup> Employers may have perceptions of refugees that dissuade them from offering employment. <sup>50 51 52</sup>   |
|                           | <b>Limited educational opportunities:</b> Legal restrictions; language requirements; time, mobility and financial restrictions; shortage of courses targeting refugees and asylum seekers; as well as racism and discrimination all pose difficulties for refugees and asylum seekers to access educational opportunities. <sup>53</sup>  |
| <b>Social connections</b> | <b>Negative public opinion:</b> Host community members are often reluctant to interact with newcomers, <sup>54</sup> which can result in the harassment of newly arrived migrants. <sup>55</sup> The reasons for this are different in different contexts and locations, but some common causes and reasoning for negative public opinion are the fear that immigrants will increase competition in the labour market <sup>56 57</sup> and impose burdens on public finance. <sup>58 59</sup> |

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Phillimore, J. and Goodson, L. (2006). Problem or opportunity? Asylum seekers, refugees, employment and social exclusion in deprived urban areas. *Urban Studies*, 43(10), pp. 1715–1736.

<sup>46</sup>Mestheneos, E. and Ioannidi, E. (2002). Obstacles to refugee integration in the European Union Member States. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 15(3), pp. 304–320.

<sup>47</sup>Newmana, A. Bimroseb, J., Nielsenc, I. and Zacher, H. (2018). Vocational behavior of refugees: how do refugees seek employment, overcome work-related challenges, and navigate their careers? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 105, pp. 1–5.

<sup>48</sup>Home Office. Indicators of integration.

<sup>49</sup>Rietig, V. (2016). Moving beyond crisis: Germany's new approaches to integrating refugees into the labor market. Migration Policy Institute. Available at: <https://migrationpolicy.org/research/moving-beyond-crisis-germany-new-approaches-integrating-refugees-labor-market>.

<sup>50</sup>Wright, A.M., Dhalimi, A., Lumley, M.A., Jamil, H., Pole, N., Arnetz, J.E. and Arnetz, B.B. (2016). Unemployment in Iraqi refugees: The interaction of pre and post-displacement trauma. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 57(6), pp. 564–570.

<sup>51</sup>Reitz, J. (2007). Immigrant employment success in Canada, Part I: individual and contextual causes. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 8(1), pp. 11–36.

<sup>52</sup>Grand, C. and Szulkin, R. (2003). Permanent disadvantage or gradual integration: explaining the immigrant-native earnings gap in Sweden. *Labour*, 16(1), pp. 37–64.

<sup>53</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs in promoting social inclusion.

<sup>54</sup>Dwyer, P. (2016). Integration? The perceptions and experiences of refugees in Yorkshire and the Humber. Project Report, Yorkshire and Humber Regional Migration Partnership. Available at: [https://migrationyorkshire.org.uk/userfiles/file/PolicyandResearch/YHRMP\\_Reports/YH\\_RefugeeFocusGroups\\_Nov08.pdf](https://migrationyorkshire.org.uk/userfiles/file/PolicyandResearch/YHRMP_Reports/YH_RefugeeFocusGroups_Nov08.pdf).

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Hainmuller, J. and Hiscox, M.J. (2010). Attitudes toward highly skilled and low-skilled immigration: evidence from a survey experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 104(1), pp. 61–84.

<sup>57</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.

<sup>58</sup>Hainmuller and Hiscox. Attitudes toward highly skilled and low-skilled immigration.

<sup>59</sup>Simon, L., Piopiunik, M. and Lergetporer, P. (2017). Information, perceived education level and attitudes towards refugees: evidence from a randomized survey experiment. Alternative Structures for Money and Banking from Verein für Socialpolitik German Economic Association. Annual Conference 2017, Vienna.

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Facilitators</b> | <p><b>Not speaking the local language:</b> Language is one of the biggest and most complex challenges faced by newly arrived refugees, limiting their capacity to access help and information, effectively interact and bond with members of the host community or navigate government registration systems.<sup>60 61</sup></p> <p><b>Lack of information:</b> Newcomers often lack information about local culture, housing, health and support services, legal advice, employment and training opportunities.<sup>62</sup> This limits refugees' and asylum seekers' capacity for self-help and leaves them in a vulnerable position.<sup>63</sup></p> |
| <b>Foundations</b>  | <p><b>Legal challenges:</b> Bureaucratic hurdles and legal restrictions can limit the opportunities of refugees and asylum seekers to legally register in the national territory and get access to the education system, work permits, health, social and financial services.<sup>64 65</sup></p>   |

These obstacles are relevant to the three countries under study, and crucially dependent on national policies, as discussed in more detail in section 4.

### 3.3 Digital platforms and digital skills

Digital initiatives considered in this review include digital platforms and providers of digital skills. These initiatives, as explained in the next section, can contribute to mitigating some of the obstacles to social cohesion previously identified. 'Digital' is anything that connects to the internet. In particular:

**Digital platforms** have a digital component that is of strategic importance to the service they offer. This goes beyond simply providing information about themselves through a website or offering the opportunity to register online. Digital platforms can include mobile apps, websites, formal and informal online education platforms (including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and initiatives such as Coursera for Refugees), local digital newspapers and blogs for refugee

communities, e-commerce platforms and digital forums and spaces for communication, networking including social media (e.g. WhatsApp, Viber, Instagram, Facebook, Telegram and YouTube) and digital games.<sup>66</sup>

**Digital skills** are defined as information and technology skills such as analytics, coding, social media, search engine and content marketing, word processing skills and web design, and digital news literacy, throughout all sectors and fields of work. They can be provided and achieved in both physical (e.g. face-to-face training courses) and virtual (e.g. through online courses and digital platforms) spaces.<sup>67</sup> Digital skills providers increase refugees' digital literacy, namely the ability to use technology to acquire and communicate knowledge and information, with substantial gains in terms of further opportunities for learning and social connections.<sup>68</sup>

The digitisation of internal processes within organisations, such as the authorities that administer the asylum process (i.e. e-government) are relevant to the field of refugee integration but are beyond the

<sup>60</sup>Rietig. Moving beyond crisis.

<sup>61</sup>Cantle. (2001). Community cohesion: a report of the independent review team. Home Office. Available at: <http://image.guardian.co.uk/sys-files/Guardian/documents/2001/12/11/communitycohesionreport.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup>Feeney, A. (2000). Refugee Employment. *Local Economy*, 15(4), pp. 343–349.

<sup>63</sup>Mason, B., Schwedersky, L. and Alfawakheeri, A. (2017). Digital routes to integration. betterplace lab. Available at: <https://betterplace-lab.org/wp-content/uploads/Digital-Routes-to-Integration.pdf>.

<sup>64</sup>Amreasha. Lebanon country report.

<sup>65</sup>Çetin et al. Turkey country report.

<sup>66</sup>Gillespie M., Ampofo L., Cheesman, M., Faith, B., Iliadou, E., Issa, A., Osseiran, S. and Skleparis, D. (2016). Mapping refugee media journeys smartphones and social media networks. Open University Research Report. Available at: [https://open.ac.uk/ccig/sites/www.open.ac.uk/ccig/files/Mapping%20Refugee%20Media%20Journeys%2016%20May%20FIN%20MG\\_0.pdf](https://open.ac.uk/ccig/sites/www.open.ac.uk/ccig/files/Mapping%20Refugee%20Media%20Journeys%2016%20May%20FIN%20MG_0.pdf).

<sup>67</sup>From a virtual point of view, there are a series of online courses that teach refugees technological skills, such as a Computer Science degree offered by the University of the People. This particular university offers tuition-free online degrees to Syrian refugees in computer science and business administration. On the other hand, there are also a series of digital skills courses which are taught in person. For instance, the 'Hack your future' programme in the Netherlands is a six-month web development programme, allowing students to learn online but also offering the opportunity to take part in weekend meet-ups in Amsterdam, master classes, and networking events.

<sup>68</sup>British Council. (2016). Unlocking a world of potential: core skills for learning, work and society. Available at: [https://britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/g264\\_schools\\_core\\_skills\\_tl\\_brochure3\\_final\\_web.pdf](https://britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/g264_schools_core_skills_tl_brochure3_final_web.pdf).

scope of this research. The table included in Annex A summarises the key digital platforms and digital skills initiatives that operate in Germany, Lebanon and Turkey, targeting refugees and asylum seekers and contributing to social cohesion.

### 3.4 Added value of digital initiatives

#### Added value

Given their scope and complexity, obstacles to social cohesion cannot be met by a single actor, and require governments, whether at national, regional or local level, to work with the private sector and civil society to address them.<sup>69</sup> Digital initiatives, for their part, have a significant role to play in facilitating a positive, two-way interaction process between refugees and the host community.<sup>70</sup> The 2015–2016 period has seen an explosion of social and technological innovation to address the European refugee crisis.<sup>71 72</sup> Technology innovations now cover the entire asylum process, from pre-departure, to transit and emergency response,<sup>73</sup> building upon the fact that most refugees have access to a

smartphone.<sup>74</sup> Digital initiatives have been developed in a number of areas, including communication, employability, education and language learning, information on asylum procedures, housing support and access to increased market and financial opportunities,<sup>75 76 77</sup> among other things. The digital nature of these initiatives gives them a number of practical advantages, which have been recognised as a way to foster social inclusion of disadvantaged groups in general, beyond the refugee context.<sup>78 79 80</sup> These advantages are set out in the table below.

<sup>69</sup>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Improving social inclusion at the local level through the social economy. <https://oecd.org/cfe/leed/improving-social-inclusion-at-the-local-level-through-the-social-economy.htm>.

<sup>70</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>71</sup>Benton and Glennie. Digital humanitarianism.

<sup>72</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>73</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>74</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs.

<sup>75</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>76</sup>Rosenbaum, J., Zepic, R., Bracklo, C. and Schreiek, M. (2018). Integreat: An information ecosystem for refugees. In: *Digital Government Excellence Awards 2018. An Anthology of Case Histories*, ACPI, pp. 47–57.

<sup>77</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>78</sup>Mervyn, K., Simon, A. and Allen, D. (2014). Digital inclusion and social inclusion: a tale of two cities. *Information Communication and Society*, 17(9), pp. 1086–1104.

<sup>79</sup>Shelter (2010). Social inclusion in the digital age.

**Table 5: Advantages of digital initiatives**

| Advantage                           | Detail   |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Access</b>                       | Digital initiatives can be <b>accessed</b> more widely by users than being solely dependent on face-to-face interaction, as long as internet connection and a device is available. This enables flexibility with regard to schedule in the case of online courses and overcoming financial and mobility restrictions that can limit access to information and opportunities. <sup>81</sup> |
| <b>Reach and cost-efficiency</b>    | These initiatives are able to quickly and cost-efficiently reach a wide audience of users. <sup>82</sup> Refugees appreciate the feeling of being globally connected and the advantages of mass, asynchronous communication, which is particularly useful when trying to communicate with people in different time zones and difficult conditions. <sup>83</sup>                           |
| <b>Customisation</b>                | In many cases, users can access the same content in different languages, and easily identify and select information and services that fit their specific needs. <sup>84</sup>  |
| <b>Real-time services</b>           | These initiatives are able to provide information and content that can be updated in real time, and services such as real-time translation and live chat. <sup>85</sup>  |
| <b>Usefulness of digital skills</b> | Digital skills are an important tool per se, given their wide range of application in different fields and the high demand for them in the job market. <sup>86</sup>   |
| <b>Reliability</b>                  | Having a dedicated platform can be more reliable than relying on social media, such as Facebook and other platforms, especially to access accurate and updated information.  |

## Positive outcomes in a refugee context

Ager and Strang's framework<sup>87</sup> is useful to categorise the ways in which digital initiatives can affect social cohesion and address some of the barriers mentioned above, through their effect on different domains of integration. This is explained in the table below, and further discussed in each case study box.

<sup>80</sup>Cantabrana, J.L.L., Minguell, M.E. and Tedesco, J.C. (2015). Inclusion and social cohesion in a digital society. *RUSC Universities and Knowledge Society Journal*, 12(2), pp. 44–58.

<sup>81</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs.

<sup>82</sup>Sawyer, R. and Chen, G. (2012). The impact of social media on intercultural adaptation. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 21(2), pp. 151–169.

<sup>83</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs.

<sup>84</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>85</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs.

<sup>86</sup>Mason, B. and Buchmann, D. (2016). ICT4Refugees. A report on the emerging landscape of digital responses to the refugee crisis. The Communication Initiative Network.

<sup>87</sup>Home Office. Indicators of integration.

**Table 6: Positive outcomes of digital initiatives**

| Domain                   | Pathways to social cohesion   | Added value of digital initiatives  |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Means and markers</b> | <b>Employment</b> provides a mechanism for income generation and socio-economic advancement, enables people to establish social connections and develop language and cultural competence, and reduces the risk of marginalisation.  | Digital initiatives can help refugees get into work and training through improved digital skills, online courses, coding programmes and employment-matching platforms. <sup>88 89</sup>   |
|                          | Access to and progress within the <b>education</b> system can facilitate access to employment and improved social connections, and increase refugees' self-confidence and determination to pursue their goals, with positive gains in terms of resilience and psychological well-being. | By visiting the website of academic institutions and training courses, refugees and asylum seekers have easier access to the courses offered and better chances to find what suits their needs. <sup>90</sup> The flexibility of access to online learning allows refugees to overcome barriers to education such as financial, time and mobility restrictions. Digital education initiatives focus on a broad range of topics, ranging from language learning, to higher education, to social action <sup>91</sup> and understanding how to access local services, among other things. <sup>92</sup> |

<sup>88</sup>Rosenbaum et al. Integreat.<sup>89</sup>Benton and Glennie. Digital humanitarianism.<sup>90</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs.<sup>91</sup>The Relief Centre. <https://www.relief-centre.org/><sup>92</sup>Colucci, E., Smidt, H., Devaux, A., Vrasidas, C., Safarjalani, M. and Castaño Muñoz, J. (2017). Free digital learning opportunities for migrants and refugees. An analysis of current initiatives and recommendations for their further use. *JRC Science for Policy*.

**Table 6: Positive outcomes of digital initiatives**

|                           |   |   |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Social connections</b> | <p>This includes:<sup>93</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Bonding</i> social capital: connections within a community that is defined by, for example, ethnic, national or religious identity.</li> <li>• <i>Bridging</i> social capital: connections with members of other communities.</li> <li>• <i>Linking</i> social capital: connections with institutions, including local and central government services.</li> </ul> | <p>Digital initiatives can create virtual and physical spaces for social connection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Virtual spaces</i> are, for instance, those created through the use of social media platforms such as Viber, WhatsApp, Facebook and Telegram, or instant messaging channels. These tools provide refugees with a cost-efficient way to keep and nurture the relationships with their family and friends back home, which fosters <i>bonding</i> social capital.<sup>94 95</sup> Social media creates opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers to expand their network in the host community, with both locals and other refugees,<sup>96 97</sup> thus fostering <i>bridging</i> social capital. Online-based community interaction can help refugees and asylum seekers to overcome feelings of loneliness and adjustment challenges.<sup>98 99 100 101</sup></li> <li>• <i>Physical spaces</i> can consist of the organisation of physical meetings (such as meet and greets and language classes) with the use of digital platforms, or resulting from relationships formed online (e.g. job-matching and housing platforms).<sup>102</sup> This can also result in refugees feeling a sense of community, with positive reverberations in terms of emotional support, psychosocial well-being and social cohesion.</li> </ul> |
|---------------------------|---|---|

<sup>93</sup>Woolcock, M. (1998). Social capital and economic development: toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework. *Theory and Society* 27(2), pp. 151–208.

<sup>94</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs.

<sup>95</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

<sup>96</sup>Gifford, S. and Wilding, R. (2013). Digital escapes? ICTs, settlement and belonging among Karen youth in Melbourne, Australia. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 26(4), pp. 558–575.

<sup>97</sup>Damian, E. and Van Ingen, E. (2014). Social network site usage and personal relations of migrants. *Societies*, 4, pp. 640–653.

<sup>98</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>99</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

<sup>100</sup>Navarrete, C. and Huerta, E.H. (2006). Building virtual bridges to home: the use of the internet by transnational communities of immigrants. *International Journal of Communications Law & Policy*, 11, pp. 1–20.

<sup>101</sup>Sawyer and Chen. The impact of social media on intercultural adaptation.

<sup>102</sup>Blanchard, A.L. and Markus, M.L. (2004). The experienced 'sense' of a virtual community: characteristics and processes. *The Data Base for Advances in Information Systems*, 35(1), pp. 65–78.



**Table 6: Positive outcomes of digital initiatives**

|                     |  |   |
|---------------------|--|---|
| <b>Facilitators</b> | <p>Knowledge of the <b>local language</b> increases refugees' ability to access education and employment opportunities and navigate the local legal and administrative system, bolsters intercultural understanding and refugees' ability to participate in social processes and supports a sense of belonging.<sup>103 104</sup></p> <p>Language learning enables social connections to be established with people from other national, ethnic or religious groups, as well as with the host community.<sup>105 106</sup></p> | <p>Digital initiatives can promote language learning through training programmes online, communication through social media and instant messaging channels, as well as YouTube videos and tutorials. Real-time translation services such as Google Translate are very useful to facilitate communication when knowledge of the local language is still limited.<sup>107 108</sup></p>   |
|                     | <p>Refugees' knowledge about the <b>national and local culture and services</b> increases their capacity for self-help, and enables them to effectively interact and bond with members of the host community.<sup>109</sup> A host community's knowledge of the circumstances and culture of refugees is also crucial to achieve two-way integration and foster social cohesion.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Social media</i> allows sharing and obtaining orientation about practical information on the local context<sup>110</sup> and different aspects of both refugee and host culture.<sup>111 112</sup> YouTube videos can be effective in spreading knowledge about different cultures and fighting traditional stereotypes.<sup>113</sup></li> <li>• <i>GPS services</i> and city-specific applications for public transportation are useful for refugees' understanding of the local context, triggering a feeling of agency and increasing chances of integration.<sup>114</sup></li> <li>• <i>Advice services</i>, usually provided by one-to-one consultations, can significantly increase their reach via digital add-ons such as online platforms where refugees can ask questions and receive an answer.<sup>115</sup></li> </ul> |

<sup>103</sup>Cantle. Community cohesion: a report of the independent review team.

<sup>104</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.

<sup>105</sup>Ward, J. and Spacey, R. (2008). *Dare to dream: Learning journeys of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women*. Leicester: National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

<sup>106</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.

<sup>107</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs.

<sup>108</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

<sup>109</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>110</sup>McGregor, E. and Siegel, M. (2013). Social media and migration research. Working Paper No. 2013-

068. Maastricht: United Nations University-Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (MERIT).

<sup>111</sup>Sawyer and Chen. The impact of social media on intercultural adaptation.

<sup>112</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

<sup>113</sup>Sawyer and Chen. The impact of social media on intercultural adaptation.

<sup>114</sup>AbuJarour and Karsnova. Understanding the role of ICTs.

<sup>115</sup>Conference on Digital Solutions for Refugees 2017. Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). Available at: [http://bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Downloads/Infothek/Tagungsdokumente/tagungsdoku-digifg17.pdf?sessionid=6A1875699B750A9BDB5C48B74C830C54.1\\_cid359?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/EN/Downloads/Infothek/Tagungsdokumente/tagungsdoku-digifg17.pdf?sessionid=6A1875699B750A9BDB5C48B74C830C54.1_cid359?__blob=publicationFile).

**Table 6: Positive outcomes of digital initiatives**

|                    |  |   |
|--------------------|--|---|
| <b>Foundations</b> | <p>This refers to the <b>rights</b> that are given to refugees and asylum seekers in the host society, as well as to the expectations and obligations of <b>citizenship</b>, depending on the local legal and administrative system. This influences both the attitudes of non-refugees towards refugees, and refugees towards the process of integration itself, and provides the basis for full and equal engagement within a given society.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital initiatives provide cheap, often multilingual access to a range of news and information on regulations, legal systems and services available in the host country, either through government websites (albeit not always well-functioning and multilingual),<sup>116</sup> or through specific platforms.<sup>117</sup></li> <li>• Digital initiatives can provide refugees with the opportunity to speak out about their experiences, thus empowering them and enabling them to re-affirm their self-identity,<sup>118</sup> connect with others who have been through the same experiences,<sup>119</sup> mobilise collective action and find support from local actors, influential figures and communities.<sup>120 121 122</sup></li> <li>• Digital initiatives are also useful to mobilise and coordinate volunteers who want to help refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>123</sup></li> </ul> |
|--------------------|--|---|

<sup>116</sup>bid.<sup>117</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.<sup>118</sup>Gifford and Wilding. Digital escapes.<sup>119</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.<sup>120</sup>Gifford and Wilding. Digital escapes.<sup>121</sup>Care. (2018). Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on: what works and why that matters for the future. Available at: [https://careinternational.org/files/files/CAREInternationalLebanon\\_RefugeesinLebanon\\_Whatworksandwhythatmattersforthefuture.pdf](https://careinternational.org/files/files/CAREInternationalLebanon_RefugeesinLebanon_Whatworksandwhythatmattersforthefuture.pdf).<sup>122</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.<sup>123</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

## Negative outcomes and limitations

Digital initiatives can also have the unintended negative outcome of decelerating the process of integration into the host society, thus hindering progress towards social cohesion.

- **Employment and education:** Digital initiatives that increase refugees' skills, employability and opportunities for refugee-owned businesses might generate increased competition with members of the host community.<sup>124</sup> This is especially the case in contexts where employment opportunities are limited, and poverty is widespread among the host population.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, the recognition of certificates and qualifications is still an issue for most digital initiatives, which limits refugees' educational and employment opportunities, and integration as a result.<sup>126</sup>
- **Social connections:** As a result of the easy links with the country of origin offered by social media, newcomers might have less incentive to find friends and develop social connections in the host society.<sup>127 128</sup> Also, social media is often used to spread and reinforce negative and stereotypical representations of refugees fleeing from war, as well as negative impressions of their cultures and religions.<sup>129 130</sup>
- **Reinforcing exclusion:** Digital initiatives specifically targeting refugees, although well intentioned, might end up reinforcing the likelihood of exclusionary and competition effects.<sup>131</sup> Directing funding and aid to refugees only, while overlooking the needs of vulnerable citizens, can increase resentment and hostility against the refugee community.<sup>132 133</sup>
- **Increased misinformation or fragmented information:** The availability of information online about services and processes available to refugees can sometimes lead to: i) inaccurate information that is either deliberately spread to sow confusion or inadvertently passed around as a result of misunderstanding and ii) an overwhelming number of sources/answers to the same question that refugees find challenging to navigate.<sup>134</sup>
- **Policy context:** Digital initiatives alone are unlikely to overcome the obstacles to social cohesion generated by an unsupportive, adverse policy environment, which provides limited opportunities for legal registration and access to training, education and the right to work.<sup>135 136</sup> There needs to be a supportive policy environment to facilitate the effective operation of digital initiatives,<sup>137</sup> as will be further explored in relation to each country context.
- **Differential outcomes:** Digital initiatives will have different outcomes for different refugee groups. Different refugee groups have indeed different needs and face different challenges in terms of access to digital resources and literacy – the so-called 'digital divide'<sup>138 139 140</sup> – integration and social cohesion.<sup>141</sup> This is discussed further in the following sub-section.

<sup>124</sup>Simon et al. Information, perceived education level and attitudes towards refugees.

<sup>125</sup>International Crisis Group. (2018). Turkey's Syrian refugees: defusing metropolitan tensions. Available at: <https://crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/248-turkeys-syrian-refugees-defusing-metropolitan-tensions>.

<sup>126</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>127</sup>Brekke, M. (2008). Young refugees in a network society. In: J.O. Bærenholdt and B. Granås (eds.) *Mobility and place: Enacting Northern European peripheries*. Aldershot: Ashgate, pp. 103–114.

<sup>128</sup>Komito, L. (2011). Social media and migration: Virtual community 2.0. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 62, pp. 1075–1086.

<sup>129</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>130</sup>Sawyer and Chen. The impact of social media on intercultural adaptation. <sup>131</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>132</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

<sup>133</sup>International Crisis Group. Turkey's Syrian refugees.

<sup>134</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>135</sup>Çetin et al. Turkey country report.

<sup>136</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on: what works and why that matters for the future.

<sup>137</sup>OECD. Improving social inclusion at the local level through the social economy.

<sup>138</sup>Verdegem, P. (2011). Social media for digital and social inclusion: challenges for information society 2.0. *Research & Policies. TripleC*, 9(1), pp. 28–38.

<sup>139</sup>Alam, K. and Imran, S. (2015). The digital divide and social inclusion among refugee migrants: a case in regional Australia. *Information Technology & People*, 28(2), pp. 344–365.

<sup>140</sup>Cantabrana et al. Inclusion and social cohesion in a digital society.

<sup>141</sup>Mason and Buchmann. ICT4Refugees.

## Different refugee needs

The table below sets out the main factors that affect how different refugee groups are able to engage with digital platforms and skills, and their different challenges in terms of social cohesion. We highlight that these factors are not exclusive, and can interact and overlap, as refugees carry multiple identities.

**Table 7: Factors leading to differential needs of refugees**

| Factors          | Detail  |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Age</b>       | Young people are generally more proficient in using digital platforms and have better digital skills compared to older generations. <sup>142</sup> As for social cohesion, children and young people face specific challenges when trying to integrate into the education system and the job market, due to time spent outside formal education and psychological trauma. <sup>143</sup>  |
| <b>Education</b> | Educated refugees are better placed to use different technologies effectively. At the same time, they can more easily integrate into the education system and labour market, and benefit from a better social and economic status, with positive gains in terms of social cohesion. <sup>144 145</sup>  |
| <b>Wealth</b>    | Financial resources are often necessary for the digital equipment to access digital platforms and tools, and related services and benefits. <sup>146</sup> At the same time, refugees who are financially better off are able to settle in more affluent areas where the competition with the locals is less severe, and tend to be more easily accepted by host communities. <sup>147</sup> Social tensions are higher in low-income areas where other marginalised groups reside. <sup>148</sup>  |
| <b>Gender</b>    | Young boys are often more encouraged to take up an interest in technology in comparison to young girls, and hence men tend to be more digitally literate. In terms of social cohesion, women have less access than men to physical and social spaces where they can socialise and interact with the host community, are more likely to drop out of school <sup>149</sup> and can face more issues when seeking employment. <sup>150</sup> This limits their ability to establish peer support networks and opportunities for skills development. Digital initiatives focused on entrepreneurial skills are particularly promising for refugee women, who compared to men are more vulnerable to harassment and exploitation in the workplace and often prefer self-employment. <sup>151</sup> |

<sup>142</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>143</sup>Ferris, E. and Kirisci, K. (2016). Syrian refugees: challenges to host countries and the international community. In *The Consequences of Chaos: Syria's Humanitarian Crisis and the Failure to Protect*. The Marshall Papers, pp. 33–70.

<sup>144</sup>Simon et al. Information, perceived education level and attitudes towards refugees.

<sup>145</sup>Jens, H. and Hiscox, M.J. (2010). Attitudes toward highly skilled and low-skilled immigration: evidence from a survey experiment. *American Political Science Review*, 104(1), pp. 61–84.

<sup>146</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>147</sup>Care. Syrian Refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>148</sup>International Crisis Group. Turkey's Syrian refugees.

<sup>149</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>150</sup>Norwegian Refugee Council. (March, 2016). Women refugees in Lebanon and the consequences of limited legal status on their housing, land and property. Available at: <https://flyktninghjelpen.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/women-refugees-in-lebanon.pdf>.

<sup>151</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

**Table 7: Factors leading to differential needs of refugees**

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Country of origin</b>            | Digital skills vary between refugees from different countries, <sup>152</sup> which affects their ability to use and benefit from digital initiatives. Refugees from Syria are noted to be the most economically well off, which allows them to more easily access first aid, phones, food and contacts on the Balkan route. By contrast, Afghans, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Eritreans and Somalis are among the poorest and have less access to digital infrastructure. <sup>153</sup> Refugees of different origin face different challenges when trying to access the job market and educational system, because of history, legal requirements and cultural divide. <sup>154</sup>  |
| <b>Stage in the refugee journey</b> | The needs of refugees change over time. <sup>155</sup> Newcomers have different needs to those who have been in the country for longer. Newcomers tend to prioritise the meeting of their basic needs, registration and housing, while those who have been in the country for longer will be more concerned with issues such as education and employment. Access to technology and the internet and opportunities to interact with the host community are also affected by whether a refugee is inside or outside of a refugee camp. Refugees living in urban environments often trigger more hostile reactions from the host population, because of overcrowding, <sup>156</sup> refugees' poor social and living conditions and activities such as begging and street vending. <sup>157</sup> |

Country-specific policy contexts need to be considered, to understand how they can mitigate or worsen obstacles to social cohesion, as well as to identify potential negative outcomes of digital initiatives and support the functioning of these initiatives. This is explored in the next section, which addresses RQ1 and RQ2 by building upon the conceptual framework and its applicability in the contexts in Germany, Lebanon and Turkey.

<sup>152</sup>Home Office. Indicators of integration:

<sup>153</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>154</sup>Amreasha. Lebanon country report.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

<sup>156</sup>International Crisis Group. Turkey's Syrian refugees.

<sup>157</sup>Çduygu, A. (2015). Syrian refugees in Turkey: the long road ahead. Migration Policy Institute. Available at: <https://migrationpolicy.org/research/syrian-refugees-turkey-long-road-ahead>.

# 4.0 Digital initiatives and contribution to social cohesion in Germany, Lebanon and Turkey

## 4.1 Introduction

This section explores what digital platforms and digital skills are being utilised that support social cohesion, and through what mechanisms, in Germany, Lebanon and Turkey, the three countries where we undertook primary data collection. We build on the conceptual framework developed in section 3, including, in particular, the domains of social integration and the key obstacles identified. Germany, Lebanon and Turkey differ significantly in their approach to managing and processing refugee and asylum seeker experiences and claims, which results in specific challenges and opportunities for integration and social cohesion. Understanding policies and contextual specificities and related country-

specific barriers and opportunities to social cohesion is important in assessing what role digital initiatives can play in improving refugees' living conditions and opportunities, and the extent to which they can be effective. As such, this section is broken down by country. Where we draw on our case studies, the name of the initiative is set out in bold and underlined.

## 4.2 Country contexts

This sub-section provides an overview of policy and international agreements that are relevant to the hosting and integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the three countries under study. This is presented in Table 8 below, followed by a brief discussion of each law and agreement.

**Table 8: Comparison of international agreements of the countries under study<sup>158</sup>**

| Country | International obligation              | Regional obligation    |   | National obligation                           |
|---------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|---|---|
|         | Signatory of Refugee Convention       | Bound by the EU acquis | The European Convention on Human Rights | Presence of Asylum clause in the constitution |
| Germany | Yes                                   | Yes                    | Yes                                     | Yes   |
| Turkey  | Yes, but with geographical limitation | No                     | Yes                                     | No  |
| Lebanon | No                                    | No                     | No                                      | No  |

The 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 protocol (**Refugee Convention**) define the term ‘refugee’ and provide the framework for the legal obligations that the signatory states must fulfil and the rights and protection that refugees are eligible to.<sup>159</sup> This includes Article 33 (principle of non-refoulement), according to which refugees must not be expelled or returned to territories where their life or freedom is threatened.<sup>160</sup>

The 1999 **EU acquis** establishes a Common European Asylum System (CEAS) with harmonised rules, procedures and conditions for humanitarian protection of asylum seekers among EU Member States.<sup>161 162</sup>

The **European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**, drafted in 1950 and signed by 47 states, provides a series of binding minimum human rights standards that must be adhered to by all signatory countries.<sup>163</sup>

The institutional and legislative framework on migration and asylum vary among the three countries and depends on the presence of **asylum clauses**.<sup>164</sup>

The next sections illustrate the adherence of the three countries to these international agreements, as well as national regulations related to refugees and asylum seekers.

<sup>158</sup>Pannia, P., Federico, V., Terlizzi, A. and D'Amato, S. (2018). Working papers – comparative report: legal and policy framework of migration governance. Available at: <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1255350/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

<sup>159</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee (UNHCR). The Refugee Convention, 1951. Available at: <http://unhcr.org/4ca34be29.pdf>.

<sup>160</sup>United Nations General Assembly. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1952. Treaty Series vol. 189.

<sup>161</sup>European Commission. Migration and home affairs: Common European Asylum System. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum_en)

<sup>162</sup>Moreno-Lax, V. (2012). Dismantling the Dublin system: M.S.S. v. Belgium and Greece. European Journal of Migration and Law, 14, pp. 1–31.

<sup>163</sup>Council of Europe. European Convention on Human Rights. Available at: [https://echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention\\_ENG.pdf%23page=9](https://echr.coe.int/Documents/Convention_ENG.pdf%23page=9).

<sup>164</sup>Pannia et al. Working Papers – Comparative report.

## 4.3 Germany

### Policy context

Since 2015, Germany has received more than one million asylum seekers.<sup>165</sup> As a member of the European Union, Germany adheres to the Geneva Convention and its protocol, and is a signatory of the EU acquis and of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).<sup>166</sup> The German Constitution includes an asylum clause that grants right to asylum as a constitutional right to everyone who flees political persecution.<sup>167</sup> There have been several amendments to legislation to accommodate the 'open door' policy of 2015 and the subsequent changes in the years since. The 'asylum compromise' of November 2014<sup>168</sup> reduced the time asylum seekers had to wait before accessing the labour market, while the new Integration Law of July 2016<sup>169</sup> made it easier for working newcomers to stay even if their claims were unsuccessful, and enabled asylum seekers to acquire permanent residency under the conditions that they learn German and find a job.<sup>170</sup>

A number of bodies are currently promoting initiatives related to asylum procedures and integration, which are mainly led by the Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI)<sup>171</sup> and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF).<sup>172</sup> These initiatives are then implemented by different actors depending on the governance level (federal, state and local) and the area (labour market, academic and vocational training, language). However, significant obstacles persist to the integration of refugees and asylum seekers in the German context and for social cohesion between refugees and host communities, as detailed in the section below.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid.

<sup>166</sup>Chemin et al. Germany country report.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid.

<sup>168</sup>Preuß, V.R. (2014). So sieht der Asylkompromiss aus. Süddeutsche Zeitung. Available at: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/herkunftsstaaten-und-residenzpflicht-so-sieht-der-asylkompromiss-aus-1.2137533>

<sup>169</sup>DW. Economist Geis: 33,000 jobs for refugees 'a success'. Available at: <https://dw.com/en/economist-geis-33000-jobs-for-refugees-a-success/a-19397020>.

<sup>170</sup>Rietig. Moving beyond crisis.

<sup>171</sup>Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI). <https://bmi.bund.de>.

<sup>172</sup>Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). <https://bamf.de>.

<sup>173</sup>Rietig. Moving beyond crisis.

<sup>174</sup>Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Recognizing vocational qualifications for refugees – examples from 'Prototyping Transfer'. Available at: <https://bibb.de/en/39350.php>.

<sup>175</sup>Ministry of Education (BMBF). Bericht zum Anerkennungsgesetz 2016. [https://bmbf.de/upload\\_filestore/pub/Bericht\\_zum\\_Anerkennungsgesetz\\_2016.pdf](https://bmbf.de/upload_filestore/pub/Bericht_zum_Anerkennungsgesetz_2016.pdf).

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Rietig. Moving beyond crisis.

<sup>178</sup>Jeffing, P., Rowe, F. and Mulder, H.C. (2015). Differences in attitudes towards immigration between Australia and Germany: The role of immigration policy. *Comparative Population Studies*, 40(4), pp. 437–464.

## Obstacles to social cohesion

We have identified some challenges in Germany that digital initiatives could help mitigate.

### Means and markers

**Labour market restrictions:** Many young refugees have had to quit education, and often lack the skills and qualifications needed in the local labour market. Germany's vocational education and training (VET) systems are not easy for new arrivals to access, which is why low-skilled jobs might be more appealing due to immediate financial needs.<sup>173</sup> Educated refugees and asylum seekers have better chances of finding a job. However, the process for recognising qualifications is often lengthy and complicated and varies depending on location and profession. To mitigate these obstacles, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)<sup>174</sup> and the Ministry of Education (BMBF)<sup>175</sup> are developing new methods for assessing and certifying skills. Nonetheless, employers are often reluctant to hire refugees and asylum seekers, due to the administrative burdens and potential cultural differences.<sup>176</sup>

### Social connections

**Negative public opinion:** The large number of people arriving in Germany has created anxieties regarding the possible impact on national and local social, economic, religious and cultural dynamics.<sup>177</sup> While the local economy is relatively strong, and hence migrants and refugees are perceived as less of a threat in the labour market, in comparison to other countries, this is not the case in less prosperous areas.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, cultural differences have often led to suspicion, with



social tensions being the most severe in areas with little experience of integrating other communities.<sup>179</sup>

## Facilitators

**Not speaking the local language:** Most newcomers speak little or no German, and language courses are oversubscribed and often prioritise groups who have a good chance of receiving legal status of refugees and asylum seekers, leaving many others without the support needed.<sup>180</sup> New initiatives for language learning are emerging, but demand still exceeds supply.<sup>181 182</sup>

**Lack of information:** The German integration system is comprehensive but difficult to navigate, because of language restrictions as well as coordination problems, as the sharing of information between agencies is limited. Understanding how different bodies work and what their specific functions are is often confusing for refugees and asylum seekers.<sup>183</sup>

## Pathways to social cohesion

As shown in Annex A, we have mapped 29 initiatives in Germany that are particularly relevant to the research. These are digital platforms and digital skills providers that are contributing to addressing these obstacles and promoting social cohesion through the domains of integration specified below.

## Means and markers

**Employment:** A number of digital initiatives in Germany support social integration and cohesion by focusing on employment promotion. **Chance for Science**,<sup>184</sup> for example, is a platform that connects refugees who are scientists to German research institutions. It enables refugee researchers to

find work, while supporting the exchange of knowledge and community building between the refugees and the host researchers.

**Coding schools** such as **CodeDoor**,<sup>185</sup> **Devugees**,<sup>186</sup> **Frauenloop**,<sup>187</sup> **ReDI** (see Case study box 1 below) and **Refugees on Rails**<sup>188</sup> are particularly suited to facilitate the integration of refugees in the German labour market, with related gains in terms of social cohesion. Many technology jobs lack some of the barriers to entry of other high-skilled fields in Germany. The working language is often English and many employers value competence and ability more than formal qualifications, which is rare in Germany's qualification-driven labour market. However, digital skills are not enough to deliver successful labour market integration, and language and communication skills, teamwork and understanding of social norms are required for refugees to integrate socially and advance professionally. Some coding schools have therefore invested in supporting social relationships. **Devugees**, for example, organises company tours and 'buddy programmes' that link each participant to a software developer who acts as a mentor, while **CodeDoor** and **ReDI** invest in strengthening the relationships between students and teachers, and organise events where students meet potential employers.<sup>189</sup>

Coding schools are likely to help only a small number of refugees, and in particular those with higher education experience, to get jobs.<sup>190</sup> However, the **spill over effects** of this can still be relevant, including higher incomes that can support families and wider social networks (including other refugees and members of the host community) as well as bringing a more positive perception of

<sup>179</sup>Boswell, C. (2003). Burden-sharing in the European Union: Lessons from the German and UK Experience. *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 16(3), pp. 316–335.

<sup>180</sup>Rietig. Moving beyond crisis.

<sup>181</sup>Beeger, V.B. (2015). Mohammeds weiter Weg zur Festanstellung. *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. <https://faz.net/aktuell/beruf-chance/beruf/projekt-in-muenchen-zeigt-wie-muehsam-es-ist-fluechtlinge-in-arbeit-zu-bringen-13838228.html>.

<sup>182</sup>Rietig. Moving beyond crisis.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid.

<sup>184</sup>Chance for Science. [https://home.uni-leipzig.de/~chanceforscience/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=101&lang=de](https://home.uni-leipzig.de/~chanceforscience/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=101&lang=de).

<sup>185</sup>CodeDoor. <https://codedoor.org/>.

<sup>186</sup>Devugees. <https://digitalcareerinstitute.org/en/>.

<sup>187</sup>Frauenloop. <https://frauenloop.org/>.

<sup>188</sup>Refugees on Rails. <http://refugeesonrails.org/en/>.

<sup>189</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>190</sup>Mason, B. (2018). Tech jobs for refugees: Assessing the potential of coding schools for refugee integration in Germany. Migration Policy Institute. Available at: [https://bosch-stiftung.de/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/2018-11/TechJobsRefugees\\_Final.pdf](https://bosch-stiftung.de/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/2018-11/TechJobsRefugees_Final.pdf).

refugees among the host community. **ReDI** interviewees provided the example of women beneficiaries who, through the new digital skills acquired, were able to open online

shops to sell their art and financially support their families.

### Case study box 1 – ReDI: School of Digital Integration

#### ReDI: School of Digital Integration<sup>191</sup>

**Category:** Means and markers. **Country:** Germany

**Key objectives and activities:** The ReDI School of Digital Integration is a non-profit technology school that offers free courses in digital skills. The school's main objective is to facilitate refugees' integration into society and the labour market. Anne Kjaer Riechert, CEO & Co-Founder ReDI School noted that they *"are teaching digital skills to break down barriers and network the experts of tomorrow"*. There are two main programmes offered in Berlin and Munich: the ReDI Digital Career Programme and the ReDI Digital Women Programme. The school also offers soft skills and job application training and provides students with networking opportunities through mentors and network events.

**Implementers:** The school was first set up in February 2016, and currently has 28 employees with 192 volunteer teachers in Berlin and 117 volunteer teachers in Munich.

**Target group:** At first, the school was focused on refugees, but this has now broadened. The school is open to everyone, both refugees and non-refugees, but is still focused on those most vulnerable. The women-specific courses do tend to be mainly attended by refugees.

**Pathways to social cohesion:**

ReDI promotes social cohesion through the following domains:

- **Employment:** By developing the digital skills of participants and providing them with networking opportunities, the programme makes them more employable. Bringing refugees looking for jobs and representatives of IT companies together during events and career fairs is one of the core activities of ReDI. Also, all ReDI teachers of the regular courses come from IT companies themselves, thus facilitating refugees' access to the IT job market. Due to these efforts, after the course, over 50% are able to transition to some sort of IT employment, whether that is full-time, part-time, freelance or as an entrepreneur. This enables participants to integrate into the local labour market.
- **Social relationships:** The programme supports participants to enhance their technical and communication skills. This in turn increases participants' confidence and sociability. An example is provided by one of ReDI's Syrian users: *"Society in general perceives me more positively because of my engagement at ReDI school. At my high school, because of my experience at ReDI, I was invited to present a project on Microsoft mixed reality glasses in class, and my school put my presentation on its website. Other students talked about it and the informatics teacher praised me"*. Furthermore, the programme developed an environment that is welcoming, and built a community of teachers and students, including both refugees and host community members. Interviewees declared that the ReDI community not only creates new friendships, but inspires participants to become more engaged and help other refugees, as shown in this quote from another Syrian user: *"Through ReDI, I became more engaged with the work with refugees. I want to avoid that newly arrived refugees make bad experiences. I also motivate other people at my high school to come and join ReDI community"*.

<sup>191</sup> ReDI School of Digital Integration. <http://redi-school.org/>.

### Case study box 1 – ReDI: School of Digital Integration

- **Information:** Though basic computer skills courses that only target women, the programme helps them navigate local systems. Women on the course are now more confident, able to use computers and read emails from their children's schools. One of the interviewees declared that some of the women participants had never used a computer before, and now feel more empowered, as the new skills they have acquired increased their autonomy and sense of agency.

#### Added value of being digital:

- **Access:** Online courses are accessible from any country and location, although most of the courses take place in the ReDI headquarters in Berlin.
- **Customisation:** Under way is a job-matching platform that matches the skills and interests of ReDI students with employers' requirements. This will provide students with increased networking and employment opportunities.
- **Usefulness of digital skills:** Given the supply gap in the IT sector in Germany, ReDI provides students with digital skills that can significantly improve their employability. Participants noted that lack of formal certification is not a problem, as in the IT sector demonstrating that you are able to do the job is more important than having the right qualifications.

Creating a community of teachers, students and alumni: ReDI has been very successful at building a community of teachers, students and alumni, and linking students to companies to multiply their networking and job opportunities. In doing so, it has managed to create a win-win situation, supporting job market integration for refugees and providing qualified labour force to IT companies in Germany. From the beginning, ReDI has involved host community members and refugees, students and teachers, in the co-creation of programme activities. The school regularly organises community and school events, company visits and career fairs, provides students with face-to-face mentorship opportunities, and encourages team work between students and alumni, which all contribute to building a positive and supportive environment.

**Health:** Psychosocial well-being has proved to be an effective pathway to strong social cohesion.<sup>192</sup> **Ipsos e-care**,<sup>193</sup> an online platform created in Afghanistan and now also operating in Germany, provides psychosocial counselling to refugees in their own language, to help them cope better with the transition to their new situation. In addition, the platform trains qualified refugees to become psychosocial counsellors who can

then support people from their own culture through direct contact or via an online video portal.

<sup>192</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.

<sup>193</sup>Ipsos e-care. <https://ipso-ecare.com>.

## Social connections

**Social relationships:** In Germany, there are a range of initiatives that support the building of social connections. **Start with a friend**<sup>194</sup> is a platform that facilitates contact and match between refugees and locals. Through digital means, users can find others sharing common interests and organise face-to-face meetings. The explicit aim of the platform is to ease refugees' process of integration and it favours social cohesion through bonding and bridging social capital. Promoting these two forms of social capital, and through these means social cohesion, is also the objective of **Kiron** and **ReDI**. Both initiatives have strongly invested in the creation of a community of teachers, students and alumni that includes both refugees and the host community. In these initiatives, social media and tools such as online mentoring and chatrooms are being used to create, consolidate and expand online communities. One of the **Kiron** staff members in Germany explained that they are increasingly investing in online community building, to provide students with more opportunities to support each other, enhance their sense of belonging and motivation and reduce their dependency on Kiron's personal support.

## Facilitators

**Language:** Language learning is one of the main obstacles to social cohesion in the German context, and several digital initiatives are trying to tackle this issue. The mobile app **Speakfree**,<sup>195</sup> for example, facilitates chat communication between users, who can use it to access support structures, exchange information and expand their network. The anonymous chat app provides an automatic translation service that covers languages such as English, French, Russian, Arabic, Dari and Urdu, and allows for its users to speak

to each other easily and develop language skills at an initial stage of learning. **DaFür**,<sup>196</sup> in turn, is both a portal and a mobile app, and it teaches German to refugees by focusing on basic language skills that help young people and adults to deal with everyday situations.

### Information/citizenship and rights:

Several initiatives have arisen in Germany, with the aim of providing refugees and asylum seekers with the information and cultural knowledge they need to develop agency and better integrate in the host society. The mobile application **Feid**<sup>197</sup> helps Arabic-speaking refugees to navigate Berlin and informs them about cultural and educational opportunities available in the city. By providing information on and encouraging participation in activities such as Syrian cooking classes and the Arabic-German Education Forum, the app can serve as a bridge for intercultural exchange and community building. Initiatives such as **Eed be Eed** and **Yallah Deutschland** have invested in the provision of information about both the Syrian and the German cultures, as a channel towards intercultural exchange, mutual understanding and improved social cohesion. The information sharing platform **Helfer-Atlas**<sup>198</sup> provides information to German nationals on how they can help refugees, through donations, volunteering or by hosting them, and combats prejudice and racism. The mobile application **Helpu**<sup>199</sup> is a location-based platform that connects refugees and volunteers in their immediate vicinity by using GPS. Through the app, refugees can submit a request and contact volunteers via a real-time broadcasting service.

<sup>194</sup>Start with a Friend. <http://start-with-a-friend.de/>.

<sup>195</sup>Speakfree. <http://getsspeakfree.com>.

<sup>196</sup>DaFür. <http://xn--dafr-2ra.saarland/index.php?id=1>.

<sup>197</sup>Feid. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/developer?id=Carthago%20Biz&hl=en>.

<sup>198</sup>Helfer-Atlas. <https://blog.campact.de/helfer-atlas-fluechtlingshilfe/>.

<sup>199</sup>Helpu. <http://helpu.solutions/Index.html>.

## 4.4 Lebanon

### Policy framework

**Lebanon** has historically provided shelter to Armenians, Palestinians, Iraqis and Syrians, as well as to a large number of unregistered refugees from other countries.<sup>200</sup> Today, the country hosts approximately 1.1 to 1.8 million registered refugees,<sup>201 202</sup> and around 2.5 million when including refugees residing informally,<sup>203</sup> making up 30% of the Lebanese population.<sup>204</sup> As such, Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of refugees worldwide, hosting around 10% of the world's total refugee population.<sup>205</sup>

As for international agreements, Lebanon is not a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) or the Geneva Convention. However, the right to asylum and basic temporary protection to individuals with well-founded fears of persecution is entrenched in the Lebanese Constitution. The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, and its Department of Political and Refugee Affairs (DPRA), oversee the entry, registration, residence, permits and exits of refugees.<sup>206</sup> Nonetheless, this has not resulted in a comprehensive refugee legislation framework.<sup>207</sup> In addition, bilateral agreements between Syria and Lebanon establish an open border policy between the two,<sup>208</sup> but the Syrian crisis in 2011 has put additional pressure on the already fragile domestic legal framework for refugees and asylum

seekers.<sup>209</sup> As a result, there is divergence between formal and informal policies that govern migration and asylum procedures in Lebanon, and between law and practice.<sup>210</sup>

International organisations such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have stepped in, to provide refugees with more security and social services, and **improve relationships between refugees and host communities**.<sup>211</sup> Over half of the interactions between refugees and host communities happen at sites or events organised by NGOs and UN agencies<sup>212</sup> which have been trying to reduce stigma towards refugees. These favour intercultural dialogue,<sup>213</sup> provide vocational training for refugees combined with life skills<sup>214</sup> and develop interventions using a participatory approach to simultaneously promote community development and reduce social tensions.<sup>215</sup>

However, lacking a more comprehensive framework for migration management, the living conditions of refugees and asylum seekers in the country remain precarious,<sup>216</sup> with several issues still posing obstacles to their integration into the host community, as discussed in the following sub-section.<sup>217</sup>

<sup>200</sup>Amreasha. Lebanon country report.

<sup>201</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2018a). Syria regional refugee response. Available at: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>.

<sup>202</sup>European Commission. (2019). European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations: Lebanon Factsheet. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/lebanon\\_syrian\\_crisis\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/lebanon_syrian_crisis_en.pdf).

<sup>203</sup>Ibid.

<sup>204</sup>European Commission. European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid.

<sup>206</sup>Amreasha. Lebanon country report.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid.

<sup>208</sup>Syrian Lebanese Higher Council. (1991c). Bilateral agreement for economic and social cooperation and coordination between the government of the Lebanese Republic and the government of the Syrian Arab Republic. Available at: [http://syrlab.org/docs/agreements/03SOCIAL\\_ECONOMICeng.pdf](http://syrlab.org/docs/agreements/03SOCIAL_ECONOMICeng.pdf).

<sup>209</sup>Amreasha. Lebanon country report.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid.

<sup>211</sup>Frontiers-Ruwad and Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN). (2015). Violation of the principle of the right to seek asylum and non refoulement, Beirut, Lebanon. Available at: [https://frontiersruwad.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/2015-upr\\_lebanon\\_right-to-seekasylum\\_joint-submission\\_march-2015.pdf](https://frontiersruwad.files.wordpress.com/2015/03/2015-upr_lebanon_right-to-seekasylum_joint-submission_march-2015.pdf).

<sup>212</sup>Care. Syrian Refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>213</sup>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2016). Youth and social cohesion in Lebanon: Reducing stigma towards refugees. Available at: [http://unesco.org/new/en/member-states/single-view/news/youth\\_and\\_social\\_cohesion\\_in\\_lebanon\\_reducing\\_stigma\\_toward/](http://unesco.org/new/en/member-states/single-view/news/youth_and_social_cohesion_in_lebanon_reducing_stigma_toward/).

<sup>214</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid.

<sup>217</sup>Home Office. Indicators of integration.

## Obstacles to social cohesion

### *Means and markers*

**Labour market restrictions:** The Lebanese government only allows foreigners to work in certain professions.<sup>218</sup> Although the abovementioned bilateral agreements between Syria and Lebanon should determine a free labour market between the two countries,<sup>219</sup> several restrictions limit Syrians' chances of integration in Lebanon. First, a Lebanese State ban on work for Syrian nationals only allows Syrians to work in low-skilled jobs in three sectors, namely construction, agriculture and 'environment' (i.e. waste management).<sup>220</sup> Furthermore, foreigners in Lebanon need to obtain a work permit from the Ministry of Labour before entering Lebanon, which can be difficult for refugees and asylum seekers fleeing from situations of conflict and danger.<sup>221</sup> Few Lebanese companies are willing to face the complex and expensive bureaucratic requirements to request a work permit.<sup>222</sup> As a result, only 0.5% of refugees of working age in Lebanon have work permits.<sup>223</sup> Because of legal restrictions, many Syrians have resorted to the black market as a coping strategy,<sup>224 225</sup> which further worsens how they are seen by the local population.<sup>226</sup>

### *Social connections*

**Negative public opinion:** Syrian refugees and host communities interact on a daily basis in shops, at the market or on the streets, but in general the level of meaningful interaction remains very low.<sup>227</sup> A poll conducted in 2013 found that over half the population believed that Syrian refugees posed a threat to national security and stability in Lebanon.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, 85% of Lebanese think that the majority of international aid benefits Syrians, while disregarding the needs of vulnerable Lebanese communities.<sup>229</sup> Xenophobia and negative prejudices, which often erupt in verbal and physical violence, are among the main problems faced by refugees, especially Syrians, in the country.<sup>230 231</sup> Among initiatives working for/with refugees and asylum seekers, since 2015 there has been reluctance to use words such as 'integration' or 'social cohesion', as they are associated with the concept of refugees staying on a permanent basis.<sup>232</sup>

<sup>218</sup>Longuenesse, É. and Hachem, R. (2013). Travailleurs étrangers, droit du travail et réglementation de l'immigration. Les carnets de l'Ifpo. Available at: <https://ifpo.hypotheses.org/5393>.

<sup>219</sup>Chalcraft, J.T. (2009). The invisible cage: Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon, Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press.

<sup>220</sup>International Labor Organization (ILO). (2014). Syrian refugees in Lebanon face harsh working conditions. Available at: [https://ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_240126/lang-en/index.htm](https://ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_240126/lang-en/index.htm).

<sup>221</sup>Amreasha. Lebanon country report.

<sup>222</sup>Faek, R. (2017). Little hope of jobs for Syrians in Lebanon and Jordan. Al-Fanar Media. Available at: <https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2017/02/lebanon-jordan-syrians-face-bleak-employmentfuture/>.

<sup>223</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>224</sup>Lebanon Support. (2016). Formal informality, brokering mechanisms, and illegality. The impact of the Lebanese State's policies on Syrian refugees' daily lives. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. Available at: <http://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/formal-informality-brokeringmechanisms-and-illegality-impact-lebanese-state-s-policies>.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid.

<sup>226</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid.

<sup>228</sup>Christopherson, M., Thorleifsson, C. and Tiltne, A. (2013). Ambivalent hospitality: coping strategies and local responses to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. FAFO Foundation Studies. Available at: <http://fafo.no/ais/middeast/lebanon/91369-syrian-refugees.html>.

<sup>229</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>230</sup>UNESCO. Youth and social cohesion in Lebanon.

<sup>231</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid.



## Facilitators

**Not speaking the local language:** In Lebanon, speaking Arabic, French and English is required to access both education and employment opportunities, which represents a critical challenge for refugees.<sup>233</sup>

## Foundations

**Legal challenges:** The application procedures and relevant bodies for refugees and asylum seekers remain undefined, and they often end up being considered irregular migrants,<sup>234</sup> which increases their vulnerability.<sup>235</sup> In December 2014, new visa requirements were introduced to regulate Syrian entry into Lebanon, preventing Syrians from maintaining or obtaining a legal status. As a result, many Syrians are now unable to access work, school, social or healthcare services.<sup>236 237 238</sup> Whilst several amendments have improved Palestinians' access to work and social protection mechanisms in the past, provisions are formulated ambiguously and still allow for multiple interpretations and tensions to arise, as seen as recently as July 2019.<sup>239</sup> Additionally, national security authorities in Lebanon play an important role in migration governance.<sup>240</sup> Migration flows are presented as a security threat, with police forces creating an atmosphere of anxiety for both refugees and host communities.<sup>241 242</sup> Because of this, many Syrian refugees are scared to leave their homes and experience isolation and loneliness.<sup>243</sup>

## Pathways to social cohesion

This section illustrates what digital initiatives are doing to address these obstacles, and what limitations they are facing. As shown in Annex A, we have mapped 15 initiatives in Lebanon, including digital platforms and digital skills providers, which foster social cohesion between refugees and the host society through the domains of integration specified below.

## Means and markers

**Education/employment:** A few initiatives in Lebanon are trying to promote social cohesion with the host community through improved education and, as a result, employment opportunities. **DOT** provides young participants with digital and entrepreneurial skills that are transferable and useful in their daily life and improve their employability. Through the digital skills he acquired at **DOT**, one of the users we interviewed created a platform and related app, called UNISEARCH, which provides students with guidance on their university choices. He is also working as a project manager within the initiative, using the money he earns to pay his university fees.

Both **DOT** and **WFP/AUB** have been very successful in recruiting refugee women, who are attracted by the possibility to learn digital skills or access digital platforms that could enable them to start their own business, often home-based. Out of the 2,200

<sup>233</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.

<sup>234</sup>Koser, K. and Martin, S. (2011). The migration-displacement nexus. In K. Koser and S. Martin (eds.), The migration-displacement nexus: patterns, processes and policies, Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 1–13.

<sup>235</sup>Amreasha. Lebanon country report.

<sup>236</sup>Lebanon Support. Formal informality.

<sup>237</sup>Lebanon Support. Syrian refugees' livelihoods.

<sup>238</sup>In 2018, a decision issued by the State Council, Lebanon's High Administrative Court, stated that any amendment to the conditions of Syrians' entry and residence in Lebanon must respect the international agreements signed with Syria, thus annulling the restrictive measures, fees and requirements introduced by General Security. However, the General Security did not announce the annulment of the restrictions, and the Council of Ministers did not issue a new decision regulating the conditions of Syrians' entry and residence in Lebanon.

<sup>239</sup>Saghieh, N. and Nammour, K. (2017). Palestinian refugees in Lebanon: What strategies can be employed to improve their rights via the judiciary? The Legal Agenda. Available at: [http://legal-agenda.com/uploads/Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon.pdf](http://legal-agenda.com/uploads/Palestinian%20Refugees%20in%20Lebanon.pdf).

<sup>240</sup>Léonard, S. (2011). EU border security and migration into the European Union: FRONTEX and securitisation through practices. European Security, 19(2), pp. 231–254.

<sup>241</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>242</sup>Lebanon Support. (2016). (In)Formal Hybrid Security in Lebanon. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. Available at: <https://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/crisis-control-informal-hybrid-security-lebanon>.

<sup>243</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

participants who have attended the **WFP/AUB** course since its establishment, 70% are women, attracted by the prospect of improving their employability. A number of interviewees have declared that, by improving their education level through **WFP/AUB**, they were able to obtain a better job and improve their socio-economic conditions. One **DOT** female participant opened the email account she currently uses during one of the **DOT** workshops, and this increased her connectivity and employment opportunities. She also appreciates that the initiative puts students in contact with each other and with local companies. A number of benefits have accrued from the training, as summarised in the quote below.

*“It impacted me tremendously. It strengthened my character. I learned new things I would never have learned otherwise.”*

User of DOT, Lebanon

To reduce the risk of competition between refugees and host community members and mitigate resentment towards the former, most of the initiatives we reviewed in Lebanon target both refugees and Lebanese nationals. However, the aforementioned restrictive regulations and cultural issues limit digital initiatives’ potential to promote refugees’ integration into the labour market. This will be further explored in section 5.5.

## Social connections

**Social relationships:** Projects that welcome refugees as well as members of the host community are powerful sites of equality and inclusion, where social cohesion and community building can be strengthened.<sup>244</sup> Compared to the initiatives reviewed in the other two countries, the Lebanese case studies have more strongly invested in involving both communities in their activities, which is important to mitigate hostility and resentment of host community members – especially vulnerable groups that might feel left behind – against refugees, reduce the risk of competition and foster bridging social capital.

The **Unite Lebanon Youth Project** (ULYP), for example, has run programmes where Syrian and Lebanese mothers learn new skills together, such as IT and English. This resulted in increased understanding of each other and the development of friendships, as well as increased the confidence of these women with their neighbours and their families.<sup>245</sup> **DOT, Aswat Faeela, WFP/AUB** and **Kiron Lebanon** all target both refugee and host communities. Initiatives focused on education, such as **WFP/AUB, DOT** and **Kiron**, have strongly invested in the creation of a community of teachers, students and alumni, including both refugees and the host community. **DOT** participants recognised the importance of interacting with people from different backgrounds and nationalities, learning about different cultures and overcoming negative stereotypes.

However, social tensions in Lebanon might be too deep to be addressed through digital means only, as declared in the quote below.

<sup>244</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>245</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.



*“In Lebanon, there are problems that cannot be solved through digital technology such as sectarianism and racism.”*

User of DOT, Lebanon

A face-to-face component might be needed to achieve better results. **WFP/AUB** and **DOT** providers confirmed that, despite initial tensions, through face-to-face, continuous interaction in class, Lebanese and refugee participants bonded and befriended each other along the way. In both projects, trainers made explicit efforts to facilitate team work and conflict resolution among students. The quotes below show the benefits of two of the initiatives under study in terms of social cohesion.

*“My perception of other people changed, I opened up to people and deal with them with respect. [...] It also gave me great exposure to meet people from different nationalities, religions and ages. This happens a lot during training courses. We learn together, eat together, we become friends.”*

User of DOT, Lebanon

*“At the start of the cycle, participants self-segregate so Lebanese and Syrians sit in different parts of the classroom, then later on they mingle and forge friendships. They also organise trips together and reported feeling like a big family.”*

Provider of WFP/AUB, Lebanon

The preference of blended approaches to support social cohesion outcomes and its importance within digital initiatives is further discussed in section 5.5.

## Facilitators

**Information:** The mobile application **Dalili**<sup>246</sup> offers an interesting example of how a digital initiative primarily focused on information provision can foster bridging social capital and, through this, social cohesion. The app provides up-to-date information on food prices in local shops in Lebanon, allowing refugees to find the most affordable and convenient options. In this way, Dalili also exerts pressure on local shops to offer fair prices, and allows users to provide feedback to shop owners, to help them stock the right products. Doing this, this app simultaneously promotes better financial planning and increased social cohesion, by improving the relationship between customers and retailers.

## Foundations

**Citizenship and rights:** **Aswat Faeela**, **DOT** and **ARM** focus on raising migrants' and refugees' awareness of their rights and endow them with the skills to collectively ask for better living conditions. Participants work together to solve local issues, by developing digital skills and stronger social relationships. However, a restrictive approach towards activists and community leaders working with/for refugees in Lebanon has limited their presence on digital platforms, and their work on the ground. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, in Lebanon the use of words such as 'integration' or 'social cohesion', and the approval of projects pursuing these objectives, is limited by the fear that these projects will help refugees stay in the country in the long run.<sup>247</sup> These limits are illustrated by the quotes below.

<sup>246</sup>Dalili. <https://innovation.wfp.org/project/dalili>.

<sup>247</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

*“It is important to have an implicit approach to social cohesion in communities that have tensions because otherwise they will be suspicious about the initiative and will reject it.”*

Provider of DOT, Lebanon

*“Refugees in Lebanon always have the feeling of being here temporarily.”*

User of Kiron, Lebanon

In spite of these limitations, the examples of **Aswat Faeela** and **ARM**, illustrated in the box below (Case study box 2), offer a promising example of digital skills promoting collective action and, through these means, social cohesion.

## Case study box 2 – Aswat Faeela/Active Voices

### Aswat Faeela/Active Voices<sup>248</sup>

**Category:** Foundations (citizenship and rights). **Country:** Lebanon.

**Key objectives and activities:** Aswat Faeela aims to expand the network and develop the capacity of young social leaders to understand and address community needs. Through training and group activities, participants learn tools and methods for data collection and analysis, develop facilitation and communication skills and organise social action projects and advocacy campaigns that aim to break stereotypes about Syrian refugees.

**Implementers:** Aswat Faeela is a regional youth development project funded by the European Commission, led by the British Council Syria and managed by the British Council Jordan, with International Alert and Search for Common Ground as consortium partners.

**Target group:** The project targets emerging young social leaders from refugee and host communities across all participating countries (Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Syria, Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands). It has so far engaged 598 young people.

#### **Pathways to social cohesion:**

Aswat Faeela promotes social cohesion through the following domains:

- **Citizenship and rights:** Through action-based research, participants gain a better understanding of community needs and how to address them through social action initiatives and advocacy campaigns. Workshops and activities focus on the adoption and promotion of peace-building values and social leadership, as well as participants' facilitation and communication skills. The audio-visual products are a key resource to share refugees' stories and gain support of the host community. Young community leaders can then contribute to creating more stable and thriving communities.
- **Social relationships:** A network of 21 youth community groups has been built across Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Denmark, France, Germany and the Netherlands. The network is involved in community-based research, advocacy and social action projects to address challenges related to economic recovery, social cohesion and peace building in Syrian communities. Project activities resulted in improved perceptions

<sup>248</sup>Aswat Faeela. <http://aswatfaela.org/>.

## Case study box 2 – Aswat Faeela/Active Voices

about Syrian youth, as a focus on refugee dispossession and helplessness has been replaced by their ability to address community needs.

### Added value of being digital:

- **Reach:** Facebook and WhatsApp allowed the project to reach a wider audience, recruit participants from a wider group and facilitate group communication.
- **Usefulness of digital skills:** Digital skills enable participants to collect, store and share information and resources on peace-building values, social action research and specific projects they developed, aimed at addressing social issues they experience in their communities. Participants produced audio-visual products such as short movies and digital photography as part of the activities, which gave them the opportunity to express themselves and develop new narratives about Syrian refugees.

**Digital initiatives for advocacy: Aswat Faeela and ARM.**<sup>249</sup> The use of digital skills and digital platforms – in particular Facebook and WhatsApp – to enable refugees to speak out about and advocate for their rights and needs links Aswat Faeela with the work of ARM. The latter's mission is to decrease racist discrimination and abuse in Lebanon at the social and institutional levels, by empowering migrant domestic workers, women in particular, and combating their social isolation. As in the case of Aswat Faeela, audio-visual products and social media are powerful ways for ARM users to communicate with each other and raise awareness of the rights of migrants and refugees, as well as the challenges they face. In both cases, this has led to the creation of new networks between refugees, and between refugees and the Lebanese volunteers contributing to the initiatives. In addition, participants have improved their communication skills and awareness of their rights and opportunities to receive support. They are now more willing and empowered to support each other in the face of violations, and to speak out against them.

<sup>249</sup>Anti-Racism Movement (ARM). <https://armlebanon.org/>.

## 4.5 Turkey

### Policy framework

Turkey has historically experienced several immigration waves.<sup>250 251</sup> Since 2011, there have been significant numbers of refugees from Syria. To date, the size of the refugee population in Turkey has reached 4 million.<sup>252 253</sup> As for international agreements, Turkey is a signatory of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and has ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention, but not the 1967 Protocol. This means that only those fleeing their countries as a consequence of events occurring in Europe can be given refugee status in the country.<sup>254 255</sup> Although the right to asylum is not regulated under the Turkish Constitution, the right to life and prohibition of torture is guaranteed for 'everyone' under Article 17, enabling a constitutional protection from *refoulement*.<sup>256</sup>

Since 2014, the country has improved its asylum and migration management capacity, with the support of the EU and the UN. By approving the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), and the related Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR) and Regulation on the Labour of Applicants and Beneficiaries of International Protection,<sup>257</sup> the country has **improved the level of its compliance with the international**

**standards**, in terms of the principle of *non-refoulement* and the provision of basic rights (including health, education, access to labour market and social services) to asylum seekers. Legally, the country approach has shifted from one emphasising 'national security' to one that puts more emphasis on human rights and international refugee law.<sup>258 259</sup> The Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) was established in 2013 as part of the LFIP under the Ministry of Interior (MoI), to centralise the governance of immigration and asylum issues and improve the registration process.<sup>260</sup>

Given that more than 96% of Syrians in Turkey are residing in urban centres, many municipalities are contributing to the provision of services that aim to favour the integration of refugees and asylum seekers, including free language courses and social support programmes, and are permitting a degree of legal flexibility for Syrians opening businesses.<sup>261</sup> However, not all municipalities are equally active in the provision of these services,<sup>262</sup> especially due to financial restrictions.<sup>263</sup> Local civil society initiatives are also involved in a number of interventions favouring refugees' integration, trying to advocate for better representation and participation of both host and refugee communities in international policymaking processes.<sup>264</sup> In spite of these advancements,

<sup>250</sup>Çduygu. Turkey's evolving migration policies: a Mediterranean transit stop at the doors of the EU. IAI Working Papers, 15(31). Available at: <http://iai.it/sites/default/files/iaiw1531.pdf>.

<sup>251</sup>Erdoğan, M. and Kaya, A. (2015). *Yüzyıldan Günümüze Türkiye'ye Göçler* (Migration to Turkey since the 14th Century). Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

<sup>252</sup>Çetin et al. Turkey country report.

<sup>253</sup>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). (2019). Turkey. <https://unhcr.org/tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/14/2019/05/UNHCR-Turkey-Operational-Update-January-2019.pdf>.

<sup>254</sup>Refugee Convention, Article 1 B(1). For details of Turkey's reservation, see <http://unhcr.ch/refworld/refworld/legal/instrume/asylum/51engsp.htm>.

<sup>255</sup>Asylum seekers from countries outside Europe may apply for International Protection (IP) status, Temporary Protection (TP) or a humanitarian residence permit. Syrians are the only group under temporary protection status.

<sup>256</sup>Çetin et al. Turkey country report.

<sup>257</sup>Resmi Gazete (2016). Available at: <http://resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/04/20160426-1.htm>.

<sup>258</sup>Çduygu. Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>259</sup>Çetin et al. Turkey country report.

<sup>260</sup>Öztürk, N.Ö. (2012). Reflections of the past, expectations for the future: a legal analysis on the development of asylum law in Turkey. *Research and Policy on Turkey*, 2(2), pp. 192–209.

<sup>261</sup>Kirisci, K., Brandt, J. and Erdogan, M.M. (2018). Syrian refugees in Turkey: beyond the numbers. Brookings. Available at: <https://brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/06/19/syrian-refugees-in-turkey-beyond-the-numbers/>.

a number of obstacles to social cohesion remain, as detailed in the next section.

## Obstacles to social cohesion

### *Means and markers*

#### **Labour market restrictions:**

Restricted access of refugees to the labour market in Turkey is not necessarily due to a skills gap, but to limited legal routes to employment (thus far only approximately 27,000 work permits have been issued)<sup>265 266</sup> and bureaucratic barriers that discourage refugee entrepreneurs from establishing formal enterprises.<sup>267</sup> Many refugees living outside camps have to work illegally in order to sustain themselves, which makes them vulnerable to exploitation, and child labour is widespread.<sup>268</sup> Illegal work also creates friction and tension with the host population.<sup>269</sup> Formal academic certificates are often missing, and it is difficult to compare qualifications between refugees' countries of origin and educational institutions in the host country.<sup>270</sup> However, Turkey's employment agency (ISKUR) is working to develop the legal and administrative basis for extending access to labour markets for Syrian refugees, and develop vocational training programmes.

**Limited educational opportunities:** Due to the efforts of the Ministry of Education to facilitate integration of Syrian children into Turkish schools, enrolment rates have improved significantly over the years.<sup>271</sup> However, financial and linguistic barriers, the long time spent outside formal education, and psychological trauma limit refugees' access to primary and higher education.<sup>272</sup>

### *Social connections*

**Negative public opinion:** In relation to the current wave of migration in Turkey, when asylum seekers and refugees first started arriving in the country they were welcomed and treated as 'guests'.<sup>273 274</sup> However, as the length of the refugees' stay has increased, public opinion has become more unwelcoming, and at times hostile.<sup>275</sup> The growing urban Syrian refugee population has put pressure on Turkey's education and health systems.<sup>276</sup> Negative attitudes towards Syrians are spreading. Many perceive them as a threat to the country's national identity and security,<sup>277</sup> and blame them for declining public services, rising housing costs, unemployment and economic competition.<sup>278 279 280</sup>

<sup>262</sup>Çetin et al. Turkey country report.

<sup>263</sup>Kirisci et al. Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid.

<sup>265</sup>Ibid.

<sup>266</sup>Asylum Information Database (AIDA). Turkey. Available at: <https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/access-labour-market-0>.

<sup>267</sup>International Crisis Group. Turkey's Syrian Refugees.

<sup>268</sup>Mason and Buchmann. ICT4 Refugees.

<sup>269</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>270</sup>Simon et al. Information, perceived education level and attitudes towards refugees.

<sup>271</sup>Narli, N. (2018). Life, connectivity and integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey: Surviving through a smartphone. *Questions de Communication*, 33, pp. 269–286.

<sup>272</sup>Ferris and Kirisci. Syrian refugees.

<sup>273</sup>Tolay, J. (2014). Deconstructing Turkish public attitudes towards refugees: Empowering rights over politicization and self gratification. *USAK Yearbook of Politics and International Relations*, 6(2013), pp. 1–29.

<sup>274</sup>Kaya, A. and Kiraç, A. (2016). Vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Istanbul. Support to Life. Available at: [http://hayatadestek.org/en/announcement/syrian\\_refugee\\_assessment\\_report/](http://hayatadestek.org/en/announcement/syrian_refugee_assessment_report/).

<sup>275</sup>Çduygu. Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid.

<sup>277</sup>Yitmen, S. and Verkuynen, M. (2018). Positive and negative behavioural intentions towards refugees in Turkey: The roles of national identification, threat, and humanitarian concern. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 28(4), pp. 230–243.

<sup>278</sup>Çduygu. Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>279</sup>Kirisci et al. Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>280</sup>International Crisis Group. Turkey's Syrian Refugees.

## Facilitators

**Not speaking the local language:** In Turkey, Turkish is required to access public services, the educational system as well as the job market. English is often also required for certain jobs. This creates challenges for refugees.<sup>281</sup>

## Foundations

**Legal challenges:** The number of incoming refugees has made it challenging to register individuals, but Turkey has made significant progress in this sense.<sup>282</sup> However, there is still a lack of information provided to refugees on both the legal and administrative systems. Refugees are unsure of whether they will be able to claim Turkish citizenship, and because of language issues and bureaucratic inefficiencies, often in danger of failing to complete the right paperwork, or missing support to which they are entitled.<sup>283</sup> Additionally, in spite of the progress previously mentioned, Turkey's legal framework is still limited in its support of refugees' long-term integration.<sup>284 285</sup> Furthermore, the national government tends not to engage local authorities or civil society in planning for initiatives designed to promote social cohesion, although these actors are best placed to understand local needs and tensions, and how to address them.<sup>286</sup>

## Pathways to social cohesion

Given these obstacles and the policy context, this section explores digital initiatives being used to support social cohesion in Turkey. As shown in Annex A, we have identified 15 initiatives in the country, including digital platforms and digital skills providers, which are fostering social cohesion through the following domains of integration.

## Means and markers

**Employment:** Among the digital initiatives operating in Turkey, **Taalum** has been particularly effective in promoting labour market integration among Syrian refugees. The users of the platform are provided with the opportunity to expand their business and technical skills through training courses, and their social networks by interacting with other entrepreneurs and customers through the online platform. Interviewees reported that host community views towards the refugees who benefit from the initiative have started changing, as these people now have registered enterprises, are able to pay taxes and contribute to the economy. The initiative has been beneficial for women in particular, as their mobility is more limited. Women have benefited from the opportunity to open home-based enterprises and showcase their products on the **Taalum** website. Their self-confidence and financial independence have improved, with positive gains in terms of agency and psychological well-being, directly related to social cohesion.<sup>287</sup> This is illustrated in the quotes below.

*“I advise other women to join Taalum, especially housewives who are producing hand-made products at home and selling them to friends or neighbours. Taalum can help them reach a wider range of people and develop their businesses.”*

User of Taalum, Turkey

<sup>281</sup>Ibid.

<sup>282</sup>Içduygu. Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>283</sup>GSMA. Refugees and connectivity. Available at: <https://gsma.com/refugee-connectivity/apps-for-refugees/>

<sup>284</sup>Huddleston, T. et al. (2015). Migration integration policy index. Available at: <http://mipex.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/files/mipex-2015-book-a5.pdf>.

<sup>285</sup>Içduygu. Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>286</sup>Kirisci et al. Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>287</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.



*“It’s good, especially for us as women. We don’t have the flexibility to go out, we have domestic responsibilities. We can find answers for their questions while we are at home, this is very important for women.”*

User of Taalum, Turkey

**Education:** A number of digital initiatives in Turkey aim to promote social integration of refugees by facilitating their access to education. **Project Hope**,<sup>288</sup> for example, aims to teach coding skills and Turkish language to child refugees through the use of an online game and an adaptive learning technology platform. A study conducted in 2017 by New York University, City University of New York and Turkey’s Bahcesehir University, has demonstrated the effectiveness of digital games such as Project Hope in teaching refugee children skills such as a new language, cognitive skills and coding, while also improving their mental health and well-being.<sup>289</sup> Language and cognitive skills, as well as psychological well-being, as previously said, are extremely relevant to foster social inclusion and social capital, and through these means social cohesion.

Another initiative that is worth mentioning is the **LEARN project**, whose flexible design – enabled by its digital nature – makes it possible to reach vulnerable adolescents who are otherwise unable to engage in formal or non-formal education. Tablets to access project activities can be used offline and in the students’ own time. Data on two cohorts of students of the LEARN project showed improvements in mathematics, English, Arabic and Turkish, skills useful to successfully integrate and thrive in the host society.

## Facilitators

**Language:** A number of digital initiatives exist in Turkey to promote social cohesion through language learning, and related advantages in terms of agency and psychological well-being. The **Tarjemly**<sup>290</sup> initiative, for example, was founded by a Syrian refugee to connect the users with a translator who is able to provide live verbal translation services. The app is available in Turkish, Arabic and English, and can also be used to translate SMS.

**Hello Hope**, in turn, is an app developed by the mobile network company Turkcell and launched in the Turkish Red Crescent Istanbul Sultanbeyli Community Centre, which offers psychosocial, referral, education and protection services to Syrians. The app offers the opportunity to learn the local language, and access practical information about public and social services available. The app also puts users in easy contact with the Turkcell Arabic call centre, if they face any problems.

**Hopes’** students declared that language learning increased their self-confidence and opportunities to progress in the educational system and in the job market. One feels proud to be able to speak three languages and help tourists. The relevance of language learning for integration is highlighted by the quote below, from one of **Hopes’** Syrian students.

*“In Istanbul University we study 30% of the subjects in English. It is essential to have some good English skills; this course can offer this support to us. I needed to improve my English because it could help me in the future to have a better job.”*

User of Hopes, Turkey

<sup>288</sup>Sirin et al. (2018). Digital game-based education for Syrian refugee children: Project Hope. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies*, 13, pp. 7–18.

<sup>289</sup>NYU Steinhardt News. (2017). Digital game intervention improves mental health and educational outcomes of Syrian Refugee children. Available at: <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/site/ata glance/2017/06/projecthope.html>.

<sup>290</sup>GSMA. Refugees and connectivity.

## Foundations

**Citizenship and rights/information:** The Palestinian NGO **Souktel** is an example of how digital initiatives can provide a platform to build a community of support, helping refugees navigate the legal system of the host community. The platform provides information to refugees, which enables them to more confidently engage with the legal system in the host society. Souktel users send their questions – translated from Arabic into Turkish – via SMS, and a backroom system analyses and sorts the incoming queries to a pre-selected group of Turkish lawyers, who collaborate with people with a humanitarian background who understand the issues faced by refugees. The lawyers and the staff provide the information needed, which gets translated back into Arabic and uploaded onto the mobile of the refugee. A better understanding of rights and obligations is the necessary premise for full engagement within the host society and creates social cohesion as a result.

All of this demonstrates that digital tools and initiatives offer great opportunities to foster social cohesion, throughout the different domains of social integration. Policymakers should explore how to take optimal advantage of these new opportunities,<sup>291</sup> to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers are able to integrate to the fullest extent possible, within existing legislative frameworks. Beyond the policy context and looking into our findings, the next section explores the key factors that can increase or restrict digital initiatives' ability to achieve the social cohesion outcomes previously identified.

<sup>291</sup>Verdegem. Social media for digital and social inclusion.



# 5.0 Key factors affecting the ability of initiatives to support social cohesion outcomes

## 5.1 Introduction

The majority of digital initiatives designed to support refugee integration started after 2015, and none of them has yet achieved scale.<sup>292</sup> Several digital initiatives have already **stopped operating or become dormant**, after an initial phase of excitement and optimism, as providers saw that their product was not generating the expected outcomes, was duplicating existing services, or was not financially sustainable.<sup>293</sup>

This section discusses some of the main factors that can **enable or hinder the ability of digital initiatives to successfully promote social cohesion**, addressing RQ3. These factors have been found to be relevant to initiatives in Germany, Lebanon and Turkey. The factors are introduced briefly below, and then discussed in more detail in the subsequent sub-sections, together with the ways by which initiatives have sought to capitalise on these factors to achieve positive outcomes.

### User responsiveness

The level of **responsiveness to users' needs** of digital initiatives can enhance access to and motivation of individuals to make use of these initiatives. This relates to the ability of providers to tailor the design and development of the digital initiatives to the specific and often differing needs of their target group(s), depending on:

- Users' **awareness** of digital initiatives.
- Their **capability** to use these initiatives.
- **Opportunities** to use the initiatives.

These issues depend on the previously identified factors such as age, gender, wealth, education, country of origin and stage in the refugee journey of different refugee groups. The responsiveness of digital initiatives to users' needs, and their resulting potential to increase social cohesion, is enhanced by their ability to:

- Actively **involve refugees** in the design and development of the initiative.
- **Adapt** to the local context.

### Including both refugee and host community

Initiatives are better able to support social cohesion when they provide opportunities for refugees and host community members to participate and engage. Opportunities for engagement are multiplied by:

- Providing content in multiple **languages**.
- Complementing **online and face-to-face** components.

### Sustainability

Sustainability is key to digital initiatives being able to continue operations to support social cohesion. Sustainability is dependent on:

- **Funding** opportunities.
- Level of **partnerships** with other digital initiatives.
- Level of **integration** with existing systems.

<sup>292</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>293</sup>ibid.

### Policy environment

As previously mentioned, digital initiatives are not a panacea. To support the fostering of social cohesion between refugees and host communities, they need a favourable socio-economic and political environment, creating the conditions for refugees' long-term integration, and providing digital initiatives with mechanisms for increasing access and achieving financial sustainability.

## 5.2 Responsiveness to users' needs

As discussed in section 3.4.4, refugees and asylum seekers are not a homogenous group, and differ in their priorities and needs along the lines of age, education level, wealth, gender, ethnicity and stage in the refugee journey. Even interventions that may be appropriate for people from one culture may not be equally effective across ages, genders or class.<sup>294</sup> Therefore, to ensure digital initiatives are effective in promoting social cohesion, it is important to consider whether and how they meet the specific needs of the target group(s), in terms of users' awareness of the digital initiatives, their capability to access and use initiatives, as well as physical and social opportunities to make use of the initiatives.

### Awareness of digital initiatives

**Refugees do not seem to have a comprehensive overview** of all the digital initiatives on offer, and the benefits they can derive from them.<sup>295 296</sup> Even when aware of the presence and relevance of social media when searching for housing, jobs or courses, refugees often prefer to draw on individual and social connections to obtain the information they need. Although most migrants and refugees have mobile phones

and use social media, these are primarily used for communication rather than informational or learning purposes.<sup>298</sup> The opportunity for providers to utilise the already present literacy and usage of social media and smartphones is described in the next sub-section.

Furthermore, refugees are often sceptical of information circulating on the internet.<sup>299</sup>

### Effective outreach strategies can help mitigate these challenges

and increase demand for digital initiatives. This includes the use of physical and digital social networks to reach, quickly and cheaply, a wider audience of users,<sup>300</sup> especially given the widespread use and accessibility of social media among refugees.<sup>301</sup> In **Germany**, volunteers within the community have been acting as intermediaries who, through offline events and workshops (see **Wefugees**)<sup>302</sup> and the placing of flyers and posters related to the initiative in information centres and accommodation (see the **Ankommen-App** from the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees),<sup>303</sup> have facilitated refugees' access to digital initiatives.<sup>304</sup>

In **Turkey**, face-to-face interaction and social media seem effective ways to promote digital initiatives. Most interviewees reported that they found out about the initiatives through word of mouth, through the Facebook account of the initiative itself, or the account of partner organisations, such as the Syrian Economic Forum in the case of **Taalum**. Because of the challenges associated with reaching its target group, **I'mappy** has been particularly effective in diversifying its promotion strategies and adapting them to the specific needs of its young audience – whose mobility and network are restricted – as shown in the box below (Case study box 3). However, **I'mappy** providers revealed that they struggle to reach newcomers, those who

<sup>294</sup>Agger, I. (2001). The problem of the wool: A response. In M. Loughry and A. Ager (eds.), *The Refugee Experience: Psychosocial Training Module*. Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre.

<sup>295</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>296</sup>Rosenbaum et al. Integreat.

<sup>297</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.

<sup>298</sup>Colucci et al. Free digital learning.

<sup>299</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>300</sup>Colucci et al. Free digital learning.

<sup>301</sup>Mason and Buchmann. ICT4Refugees.

<sup>302</sup>Wefugees. <https://wefugees.de/>.

<sup>303</sup>Ankommen-App. <https://ankommenapp.de/>.

<sup>304</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

would benefit the most from the initiative, because they do not have permission to conduct promotion activities in camps.

### Case study box 3 – I'mappy

#### I'mappy<sup>305</sup>

**Category:** Facilitators. **Country:** Turkey.

**Key objectives and activities:** I'mappy is a navigation mobile application that offers information to young refugees about youth organisations able to support them with the asylum process, the country's cultural norms and legal system, and the services available to refugees, including education and training, language learning, psychological support, recreational and employment opportunities.

**Implementers:** I'mappy is a mobile app primarily managed by the Research Centre on Asylum and Migration (IGAM), which is a national NGO. There are also other partners that implement the project in different countries, such as Tera Ankara (Turkey), Vsi Pasaulio Piliėciu Akademija (Lithuania), ADEL (Slovakia), IASIS (Greece), TDM 2000 (Italy).

**Target group:** The initiative targets young refugees, with the specific profile of the refugees being dependent on the country in which the app is accessed. In Turkey, the majority of beneficiaries are Syrians and Iraqis, while in Italy they mainly come from African states.

#### Pathways to social cohesion:

I'mappy promotes social cohesion through the following domains:

- **Information:** The initiative provides young refugees with information about how to access services that could then help them integrate. For instance, I'mappy provides contact details of institutions and organisations where refugees can interact with Turkish natives, as well as schools where Turkish language courses are offered. One of our interviewees, a female Iraqi refugee, declared how useful the app was to find psychological support for her daughter and locations where food or clothes for refugees are distributed, a service she did not know about. She is now using the app to find education and sport opportunities for her and her children. Another Iraqi interviewee stated the importance of having access to this information on an interactive map, and without having to spend money on transportation fees.

#### Added value of being digital:

- **Access:** I'mappy's online presence allows the app to be easily and freely downloaded and used by those with a phone, which means users are able to access information without having to spend money or time on transportation.
- **Real-time services:** The app provides an updated and reliable mapping of all NGOs, national authorities, and health centres working with/for refugees at the district level, including addresses and contact details.
- **Customisation:** The app is multilingual, with content available in Turkish, Arabic and English.

<sup>305</sup>I'mappy. <https://imappy.org>.

### Case study box 3 – l'mappy

**Different promotion activities to reach a difficult target group:** Promoting the app among the l'mappy target group of young refugees is difficult, as their mobility and networks are restricted, and app administrators need permission to promote l'mappy within schools. It is also difficult to reach newcomers, those who would benefit the most from the initiative, as the app administrators do not have access to refugee camps where they could promote the app to the newly arrived refugees directly. However, IGAM has been able to develop a strong network of refugees and NGOs that help promote the initiative, as well as partnerships with local community centres. Taking advantage of this network, IGAM has organised events with local NGOs and young refugees on how to use the digital map, and provided them with a user guide. They distributed brochures at every event, and gave a TV interview to increase the reach. In addition, IGAM relies on Facebook and word of mouth to promote the initiative, as well as involve the muhtar (elected neighbourhood representative) and school administrative staff in offline promotion activities.

### Capability

Literacy skills and knowledge of the host language and English language improve refugees' employability and opportunities for integration, as well as their chances to take advantage of digital initiatives. However, limited digital and language skills are also some of the main obstacles to the use of these initiatives, as revealed by the users of **DOT** and **WFP/AUB** in **Lebanon**, and **Hopes** in **Turkey**. In spite of the high rates of smartphone and social media usage (mainly Facebook and WhatsApp) among refugees (especially Syrians),<sup>306</sup> the **levels of digital literacy seem to be low**.<sup>307</sup> Refugees are not used to accessing apps or search engines.<sup>308</sup> Only a small minority of refugees use email, which limits the opportunities to contact them. This also means that any service that requires an email address, for example, as a mode of authentication or to create an account in the App Store to download an app, is likely to exclude a large proportion of refugees.<sup>309</sup> Low levels of digital literacy among users are also likely to coincide with low awareness on the issue of informed consent around data collection and usage.<sup>310</sup> Our fieldwork has revealed that, since most refugee students do not use emails, **Kiron** staff are obliged to use

WhatsApp, which has implications for EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance.

A key factor affecting the capability of users to make use of digital initiatives includes the extent to which the digital initiatives are **aligned with the ways in which refugees currently use digital tools**. This includes aligning the digital initiative with apps that come pre-installed on smartphones, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, which are highly used by refugees.<sup>311</sup> Any digital project that requires more effort, such as a new app that needs to be installed, or a website accessed through a browser, would be more difficult for some potential users to access.<sup>312</sup> In **Germany** and **Lebanon**, **Kiron** students revealed that they are not familiar with the use of the online forum and the chatroom set up by the initiative, and would rather prefer to use WhatsApp, as illustrated in the quote below:

*"[I wish] there could be a way to communicate directly with peers through WhatsApp... There is a forum/chatroom but I have not used it. It is a hassle to log on and access this space. WhatsApp is much quicker and the replies would be more frequent."*

<sup>306</sup>Narli. Life, connectivity and integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>307</sup>Mason and Buchmann. ICT4Refugees.

<sup>308</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>309</sup>Ibid.

<sup>310</sup>Mason and Buchmann. ICT4Refugees.

<sup>311</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>312</sup>Ibid.

### User of Kiron, Lebanon

For this reason, there is a trend towards increased ‘user-friendliness’ and towards aggregating resources and tools – information links, language learning offers, etc. – on the same platforms.<sup>313</sup> In **Lebanon**, both **Aswat Faeela** and **WFP/AUB** are capitalising on digital tools that young participants already use, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, to promote or implement project activities. In **Germany**, **WhatsGerman**<sup>314</sup> delivers its language courses through the messaging service WhatsApp. To further mitigate educational inequalities and improve refugees’ levels of digital literacy, German initiatives such as **Devugees** and **ReDI** have implemented a flexible approach to coding learning that could potentially encourage less experienced learners to develop their digital skills and reap the benefits of them.

In spite of this progress, appropriate levels of awareness and action on how to handle personal data and app users’ behaviours are still insufficient. Given that the identity of refugees is sensitive, there is a need for digital initiatives working with this target group to make more efforts to develop and use strict ethical data practices. Refugees consider carefully the surveillance capabilities and practices of governments before deciding whether to engage with online services, but more could be done to provide refugees with education about data rights.<sup>315</sup>

### Opportunity

As for physical opportunities to access digital initiatives, **lack of reliable internet access** represents a significant barrier.<sup>316</sup> Power shortages and weather conditions negatively affect internet connection, especially in rural and low income areas. The infrastructure of free Wi-Fi points in European countries

facilitates access for smartphone owners, but the relative decline in internet cafes (in comparison to other countries) can make it harder for those who do not own the hardware. In **Germany**, **Eed Be Eed** initially faced implementation issues related to a lack of internet access, because it was solely present online. Many asylum hostels do not have access to the internet and therefore refugees could not access the website. In order to solve this problem, the initiative started printing and distributing magazines in the shelters. Volunteer initiatives such as **Freifunk**<sup>317</sup> and **Refugees Online**,<sup>318</sup> in turn, have tried to provide refugee accommodation with internet access. In **Lebanon**, data costs are particularly expensive, compared to Germany and Turkey. Domestic workers participating in **ARM** are isolated, restricted in their access to online activities because either they do not have access to internet connection at their workplace or at home, or cannot afford a 3G connection. In the case of **DOT**, internet access at the training centres is at times so poor that participants prefer to use their mobile phones rather than the computers.

Furthermore, only a minority of refugees have **access to a laptop or a computer, while most of them have access to a smartphone**.<sup>319 320</sup> Mobile apps are particularly suited to answer the needs of refugees, as most of them have access to a smartphone,<sup>321 322</sup> and the offline function of the app enables refugees to access documents and information even without internet access.<sup>323</sup> In **Turkey**, **I’mappy** and **Gherbetna** mobile apps have been praised by our interviewees because of their accessibility and practicality (see Case study box 4 below). The **LEARN Programme**<sup>324</sup> uses tablets that can be used offline and

<sup>313</sup>Colucci et al. Free digital learning.

<sup>314</sup>WhatsGerman. [https://whatsgerman.de/whats\\_app\\_sprachkurs\\_eng.html](https://whatsgerman.de/whats_app_sprachkurs_eng.html).

<sup>315</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>316</sup>Ibid.

<sup>317</sup>Freifunk. <https://freifunk.net/>.

<sup>318</sup>Refugees Online. <http://refugees-online.de/en/>.

<sup>319</sup>Narli. Life, connectivity and integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

<sup>320</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>321</sup>Narli. Life, connectivity and integration.

<sup>322</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>323</sup>Rosenbaum et al. Integreat.

<sup>324</sup>Streng, M. (2016). Learn: neighbourhood blended learning for adolescents in Syria. Mercy Corps. Available at: [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/583af1fb414fb5b3977b6f89/t/59bdba2e8fd4d220c116fd00/1505606191957/5\\_PromisingPractices\\_MercyCorps\\_WEB.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/583af1fb414fb5b3977b6f89/t/59bdba2e8fd4d220c116fd00/1505606191957/5_PromisingPractices_MercyCorps_WEB.pdf).

in the student's own time, to overcome accessibility barriers faced by its target of vulnerable refugee adolescents. By contrast, participants of **Hopes** complained about the difficulty of accessing the courses through the online platform, as access through smartphones was not possible in app format. The sessions are considered too long, and they do not offer the possibility to save progress and restart later. Similarly, the **Taalum** platform is only accessible through the website, and is unavailable in mobile

app format. Compared to websites, users prefer mobile apps due to their practicality. However, the cost of designing and running a digital app is much higher than the cost of a website, especially when the NGO is outsourcing this service, as revealed by **I'mappy** administrators. In general, Facebook messenger bots are still the preferred way to communicate with others, compared to mobile apps that refugees have to download and install.

#### Case study box 4 – Gherbetna

### Gherbetna<sup>325</sup>

**Category:** Facilitators. **Country:** Turkey.

**Key objectives and activities:** Gherbetna is a mobile app that provides a range of information and support to refugees recently arrived in Turkey. The app includes: information relating to asylum procedures, laws and regulations, as well as current news, with a focus on Syria; a section that lists job opportunities; a feature called 'Help Me' which offers support and allows refugees to ask for information on health and other services available in Turkey; legal counselling in Arabic; and videos that can help refugees learn English.

**Implementers:** Gherbetna was founded by a Syrian refugee residing in Turkey.

**Target group:** The target groups comprises refugees from Arabic-speaking countries, although the majority of the beneficiaries are from Syria. Every day, there are 5,000 visitors, 2,500 applications and between 700,000 and 1 million reaching out through Facebook.

#### **Pathways to social cohesion:**

Gherbetna promotes social cohesion by affecting the following domains:

- **Information:** Due to the information provided by the app, refugees are able to learn more about the country they are residing in, and learn about Turkish cultural norms and how to communicate with Turkish people, with gains in terms of social cohesion. A Syrian interviewee declared: *"I check the application every day because they always publish the most recent news concerning Syrians. I can find on the application all laws and regulations that I need to know about, like traffic laws, rent laws, migration and refugees, temporary protection. We need to learn the regulations, for sure, we are living here now. We must understand the law and respect it."* The refugee news component of the app is particularly appreciated, as it shares success stories about Syrians in Turkey, inspiring other Syrians to move on, and potentially improving refugees' reputation in the country. The app is also working on the development of videos targeting both the Syrian and the Turkish communities, with the aim of promoting intercultural exchange and mutual understanding, and breaking stereotypes about Syrians by sharing success stories.

<sup>325</sup>Gherbetna. <http://8rbtna.com/>.



### Case study box 4 – Gherbetna

- **Employment:** Interviewees explained that, through the app, they have been able to find jobs that match their skills, thus integrating into the labour market and improving their socio-economic conditions. This has positively affected their long-term prospects in the country, as highlighted by a Syrian interviewee: *“I applied for one of the vacancies in a water filters company, and since then I am working there. After I found this job through Gherbetna, my life improved a lot, my current job is much better than the previous one, when I used to work in a clothing store. My current job improved my social life, I have better professional and personal relationships. Now I feel more confident, independent and responsible. I am living here alone, away from my family, but I feel more secure since I am working now.”* Another Syrian interviewee confirmed: *“I found my current job through the application. After finding this job, I decided to stay here in Turkey. Before that I was thinking of going back to Syria despite the situation there.”*

#### Added value of being digital:

- **Reach:** The app has managed to access a large number of people due to its presence on social media and on the internet.
- **Real-time services:** Interviewees mentioned that the app is easy to use and provides them with access to extremely useful, updated and reliable information, as well as helping refugees find employment.

**Practical and reliable mobile app:** The app is extremely easy to download and use and offers reliable information. As noted by one interviewee: *“I always advise people to download the app, it's very helpful. It's easy and safe to look for a job using the app. Before the app, I used to look for a job using Facebook or friends, but on Gherbetna you know the announcements are not fake, they are removing old announcements after a while, which means that they are taking people for those vacancies.”* The information and news offered on the app are regularly updated and verified by a trusted source. The information provided is checked every two months, which is especially important in the Turkish context, where laws and regulations concerning refugees and asylum seekers change quickly. Stakeholders noted that this is an important advantage compared to social media, which can often disperse ‘fake news’.

**Cultural and linguistic barriers** are a further obstacle for digital initiatives.<sup>326</sup> In **Lebanon**, in the case of **DOT**, students interviewed complained that the application form was only in English and not in Arabic. Language barriers have also been reported as an obstacle in **Turkey**. Initiatives such as **Hello Hope** mainly focus on Arabic speakers, and Syrians in particular, thus disadvantaging other refugee groups. Iraqi interviewees who use **I'mappy** services complained about NGO support being heavily geared towards the needs of the Syrians, often overlooking the needs of other refugee groups. Iraqi interviewees suggested making sure that none of the features of the app are in Syrian dialect, as this limits the ability of the app to meet the needs of non-Syrian beneficiaries. However, financial restrictions prevented **I'mappy** from translating the app content into Dari and reaching the Afghan refugees residing in Turkey.

**Financial constraints**, related to work commitments and transportation fees, as well as **time and mobility restrictions**, have been mentioned by the users of **Hopes**, in **Turkey**, and **ReDI**, in **Germany**, as the main challenges to attending the face-to-face courses. Online courses may help to overcome these limitations. Financial considerations led both **Hopes** and **ReDI** to offer academic scholarships, **Kiron** in both **Germany** and **Lebanon** to offer free courses, and **DOT** in **Lebanon** to subsidise participants' attendance to compensate for the loss of revenue. This has proved particularly important in rural areas. To make the initiative more responsive to the needs of users with multiple commitments and time restrictions, **Hopes** adopted a blended learning model, described in the case study below (Case study box 5). To increase the responsiveness of the initiative to different schedules, users also suggested allowing saving the progress made on a session and restarting later. This is not possible at the moment.

### Case study box 5 – Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians (HOPES)

#### Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians (HOPES)<sup>327</sup>

**Key objectives and activities:** The objective of the Hopes (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians) programme is to “improve prospects for young Syrians and to contribute to the preparation for post-crisis reconstruction in Syria. The project will increase participation and provide better access to quality further and higher education opportunities in the neighbouring region for vulnerable Syrian youth as well as host communities.”<sup>328</sup> The programme is being delivered in Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, through the following work packages: academic counselling; a scholarship fund, an English access programme consisting of face-to-face classes and an online course (LearnEnglish Select); stakeholder dialogue to facilitate coordination between stakeholders; and funds for innovative education offered by local providers.

**Implementers:** The programme is delivered by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in collaboration with its partners from the British Council, Campus France and EP-Nuffic.

<sup>326</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>327</sup>Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians (HOPES). <http://hopes-madad.org/>.

<sup>328</sup>British Council. Hopes. Available at: <https://britishcouncil.org.uk/en/programmes/education/hopes>.



### Case study box 5 – Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians (HOPES)

**Target group:** Primary beneficiaries are Syrian refugees of post-secondary age as well as young people in host communities affected by the high influx of refugees. Other refugees are also able to access the programme.

#### Pathways to social cohesion:

- **Education:** The programme aims to support refugees' integration through provision of education opportunities and development of skills to increase their access to employment opportunities. Participants note that the advice and information provided have been useful in supporting their job search.
- **Employment:** The *LearnEnglish Select* component of the programme aims to improve participants' employability, and trains them on how to write a CV, conduct a job interview and job-oriented networking, write a professional email, etc. As previously mentioned, integration into the job market is crucial for social cohesion.
- **Social relationships:** The programme seeks to increase social cohesion by bringing refugee and host community students and teachers together, thus moving beyond bonding, and promoting bridging social capital. One implementer noted that, "*Turkish students are included in the project in order to contribute to the adaptation process of refugees and to reduce the pressure on the host community.*" It was noted that there are limited numbers of Turkish students attending these courses. However, when they do attend, students and teachers reported that good mixing and discussions between students have been achieved. Furthermore, delivery with only Syrian students was sometimes difficult due to the language barrier. However, when Turkish students joined, they acted as an intermediary.

#### Added value of being digital:

- **Access:** The online component of the programme (*LearnEnglish Select*), focused on skills to increase participants' employability, provides flexibility for students, who are often working part-time, to access the trainings when convenient for them.

**Blended learning model:** The English access programme uses a blended learning model that combines the flexibility of online learning with the opportunity for face-to-face support and interaction between students. The 40-hour online component, called *LearnEnglish Select*, complements the 100-hour face-to-face component. Interviewees noted that students varied in whether they preferred the online or face-to-face learning and, in this way, the blended learning approach makes it accessible to both groups of students. However, it was noted that the two components of the programme could be better integrated, as the content and quality of the two offerings differ, and the online courses target users' needs better than the face-to-face ones.

As previously mentioned, **gender** is an important factor to consider when designing and developing digital initiatives able to foster social cohesion. Women's opportunities for integration and access to digital initiatives are substantially less than men's, because of mobility restrictions and cultural barriers, among other things. In **Turkey**, one of **I'mappy** users mentioned the importance of tailoring services further towards women, by, for instance, offering specific legal counselling for them, options to work from home, or help with child care. In **Germany**, **RefuShe**, **Girls Got It** and **ReDI** plan programmes and activities aimed at women, catering specifically to their backgrounds and situations.<sup>329</sup> In **Lebanon**, **WFP/AUB** enables female participants to bring their children to the class, and project coordinators or other participants often take care of the babies while mothers complete their exams. **DOT** has been able to partner with local and reliable organisations to develop a relationship of trust with the local community and overcome cultural barriers, thus reaching girls whose attendance would have otherwise been opposed by their families for cultural reasons.

## Actively involving refugees

Digital initiatives need enough on-the-ground experience and understanding to be able to answer the different needs and profiles of their target group.<sup>330</sup> **Incorporating refugees' feedback and perspectives** is crucial to ensure that digital initiatives are able to answer their needs and achieve positive outcomes, including in terms of social cohesion.<sup>331</sup> Most of the digital initiatives created in 2015 lacked input from refugees, but the situation has now improved, and an increasing number of digital initiatives make dialogue with refugees more central to their approach.<sup>332</sup> A few initiatives regularly collect feedback to develop a better understanding of user needs and how they change over time, whether and how the digital initiative is answering them, and whether and how it needs to be adapted to do so.<sup>333</sup> Not only are these initiatives seeking feedback

from users, but some have recruited refugees onto their team.

In **Lebanon**, **WFP/AUB** regularly administer surveys to their participants, to assess their satisfaction levels, as well as project outcomes. On this basis, the project has adapted the length and intensity of the course to participants' needs, has included the teaching of soft skills, and has provided participants with the opportunity to practise the use of computers during weekly Open Lab Days, with direct teachers' supervision. All of these developments were at the request of the participants of the programme.

In **Germany**, based on users' feedback, **Kiron** has developed a flexible course offer that is adaptable to students' interests and needs, and has started to provide digital and soft skills courses. The initiative has increasingly involved refugees as staff, who now provide support to other students, and the Lebanese office has plans to do the same. **ReDI** has been particularly successful in the co-creation of programme activities. Especially at the start, there was a concerted effort to involve host community members and refugees, students and teachers, through the use of workshops to ensure the programme was tailored to their needs. For example, courses stop during Ramadan, interpreters are on hand to provide support with linguistic barriers and courses during the weekend provide childcare. Refugees are also involved as staff members.

In **Turkey**, **Gherbetna** and **Taalum** are both created and led by Syrian refugees, with improvements in terms of how well these initiatives are able to understand and incorporate refugee needs. **Gherbetna** has evolved from only providing information and news, to providing guidance about the local labour market, at the request of its users.

**Taalum** has conducted need assessments at different stages of project development, to keep the initiative relevant to user needs and adapt it accordingly, as illustrated in the case study box below (Case study box 6).

<sup>329</sup>Ibid.

<sup>330</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>331</sup>British Council. Language for resilience.

<sup>332</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>333</sup>Ibid.

## Case study box 6 – Taalum

### Taalum

**Category:** Means and markers. **Country:** Turkey.

**Key objectives and activities:** The key objectives of the Syrian Economic Forum are to promote private sector development and entrepreneurship among Syrians. On this basis, Taalum aims to provide Syrian refugee entrepreneurs with courses and mentorship for them to understand investment opportunities and the business environment in Turkey. Online courses focus on issues such as time management and effective communication; providing mentoring, information and legal support to Syrian refugee entrepreneurs on how to navigate the legal system in Turkey; partnering with the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce to provide a recognised certificate; and translating laws and other regulatory information into Arabic.

**Implementers:** The project is run by the Syrian Economic Forum (SEF), funded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and supported by the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce (CoC).

**Target group:** The project targets both Syrian entrepreneurs who are still in the ‘business idea’ stage, and micro businesses looking for more capacity building and opportunities. The project focuses on the six cities identified by the needs assessment where the majority of Syrian businesses are concentrated. At first, the project worked mainly with Syrian men, but it is now focusing more on Syrian women. The project reaches its target audience through Facebook and Syrian Economic Forum events.

#### Pathways to social cohesion:

Taalum promotes social cohesion by impacting the following domains:

- **Employment:** The project contributes to social cohesion by supporting users’ integration into the labour market, in particular through entrepreneurship. By helping them earn income, the initiative enables refugees to pay taxes, which can potentially improve the host community’s perceptions about refugees. Partnership with the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce enables Taalum to provide students with a recognised certificate.
- **Social relationships:** Taalum builds connections between its users, who can reach other entrepreneurs or potential clients through the online platform. An interviewee noted that Taalum “*is a good place to make a connection with people not only in Gaziantep. It’s a good place to create a network with people who share the same interests. Otherwise, it’s impossible to reach those people.*” Interviewees praised the platform because it is not purely digital, but also connected with people on the ground. Taalum indeed connects Syrian entrepreneurs with Turkish entrepreneurs through the face-to-face components, including training sessions and other events organised by the Syrian Economic Forum and Chambers of Commerce.
- **Citizenship and rights/information:** The initiatives help users understand the Turkish labour market and legal system in relation to regulations to open businesses. This enables Syrian entrepreneurs to overcome difficulties resulting from the differences between their home country and the host society, both culture-wise and system-wise, promoting agency and well-being, both related to social cohesion.

### Case study box 6 – Taalum

#### Added value of being digital:

- **Access:** Because of the possibility to be accessed from anywhere and at any time, online courses were noted to be particularly accessible and efficient for women, who often find it challenging to leave the house, due to their family and care responsibilities.
- **Reach:** Respondents noted that the platform can be used as a source of information about the market and what people are looking for, and as a marketing tool, reaching a wide audience of potential consumers. An interviewee noted that: *“People on the platform are very supportive, Taalum helped me in showing my products on their website and it was very helpful to receive compliments or feedback from other users, which helped to develop my products.”* The platform also enables users to raise questions and find answers, get feedback and network with other entrepreneurs.
- **Real-time services:** The initiative provides up-to-date information that is more trustworthy than information found on Facebook.

**User responsiveness and adaptability:** The platform was created by a Syrian refugee which has promoted trust and a strong level of cooperation between the providers and users. As a representative of the Syrian Economic Forum noted, *“We are local providers, the Syrian community know us and trust us. We are an organisation that is led and developed by Syrians, designed by local Syrians compared to [others]. We know better ways of how to deal with the population we have been working with, where to announce the platform and news, we know our people.”* Additionally, the project was designed based on needs assessments. This helped providers to identify Syrian entrepreneurs’ need for legal support, given the majority of Syrian small and medium enterprises are not registered, and the limited participation of refugee women in the labour force. Another needs assessment focusing on Syrian women identified family and care responsibilities as the main barriers to their participation in the labour force. Hence, the online platform was designed to respond to these needs, by providing information on the Turkish systems, and supporting Syrian women who would like to work from their homes, capitalising on the fact that the majority have smartphones and internet connection. The initiative also built a network for women, called the Business Woman and Entrepreneur Network. Seven women joined the board of this initiative. On a monthly basis, they share problems faced by women entrepreneurs, which the project then tries to resolve.

### Adapting to the local context

User responsiveness also refers to the ability of initiatives created in a country and exported to another context to adapt to the latter, understanding and responding to the specific needs of refugees in the new context. Hopes, for example, operates in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Although the users of the initiatives in Turkey find the course content useful, they would prefer to be provided with material and advice more aligned with the Turkish context, especially in terms of job market requirements. In addition, Hopes

teachers found it challenging to work with Syrian refugees, as they were not trained to deal with trauma and the psychological issues of refugee students. As for Kiron, it operates in two of the countries under study, namely Germany and Lebanon (in Turkey it has stopped operating). For this reason, it offers interesting insights into the issue of adaptation to different contexts, as illustrated in the box below (Case study box 7).

## Case study box 7 – Kiron

### Kiron<sup>334</sup>

**Category:** Means and markers. **Countries:** Germany and Lebanon.

**Key objectives and activities:** Kiron aims to enable refugees to continue or gain access to university education in their host countries, by fast-tracking refugees into the university system. It provides two years of online learning, by linking to Massive Online Open Courses (MOOCs) on various platforms such as Coursera. It directs students to online modules covering undergraduate degrees, language courses and preparation foundation courses. It adopts a blended model whereby all students have access to online learning, and some students also have access to structured sessions in a learning centre. It offers completely flexible timelines that enable students to attend modules at their own pace, with no fixed start and completion dates.

**Implementers:** Kiron is a digital learning platform, which was launched in 2015 and is based in Germany.

**Target group:** The main target group are refugees who wish to start or continue their university studies. The platform can be accessed internationally. It follows a partnership model and has 41 partner universities in six countries.

#### Pathways to social cohesion:

- **Education:** Through learning and studying, students are expected to feel empowered, which allows them to become more self-confident and determined. This supports their integration because they are more open to different ways of thinking, better able to follow their own goals and make their own decisions, and to secure further education, training and employment opportunities. This was revealed by a Palestinian Syrian refugee: *“Without Kiron, I could not complete my courses for my chemistry degree at the Lebanese university. When I joined, it was a new environment, learning was very different. So online learning was a great mind-opener. Most importantly, it gave me international exposure to different scholarly traditions and ways of thinking, the British, the French, the American, etc. It also helped in improving my English.”*
- **Social relationships/information:** Students are provided with continuous support throughout their journey at Kiron and beyond, including the registration process, sustaining motivation, understanding how to integrate into the education system and what kind of skills are required to succeed. This results in better chances for integration, as well as close relationships between Kiron students and staff. Also, the online space for students and alumni enables connections to be developed across countries, and the creation of an online community. Users reported that their perspectives on different topics have broadened, due to the exposure to students from different cultures and contexts. This has made them more open to interact with and learn from others. In Lebanon (and Jordan), Kiron has opened to host communities, with further gains in terms of bridging social capital, and therefore social acceptance and cohesion.

<sup>334</sup>Kiron. <https://kiron.ngo/>.

### Case study box 7 – Kiron

#### Added value of being digital:

- **Access:** The platform is easy to navigate and enables refugees to access a variety of courses from anywhere and at any time.
- **Reach:** The online community connects students from across the world.
- **Real-time services:** The platform offers learning in real time through a forum and live chats that help students communicate and learn online.
- **Customisation:** In Germany, Kiron administrators are working to develop an online counselling system tailored to the needs of each student and able to provide personalised advice.

**Programme adaptation to different contexts:** Kiron activities and mode of implementation vary, depending on the context.

- **In Lebanon,** the Kiron office started with an online-based model but has recently moved to blended learning because of obstacles of digital infrastructure (e.g. access to internet connection) and the preference of students for face-to-face learning. This is because the self-paced model of learning does not work for everyone, and face-to-face support is needed to sustain motivation. Kiron users interviewed in Lebanon also asked for labs where they could practise the new skills acquired and have more opportunities for peer-to-peer knowledge exchange and collaboration. On this basis, a centre for face-to-face learning was recently opened in Saida and another will be opened in the Bekaa valley. Physical interaction is also important in Lebanon as a way to promote social cohesion between refugee and host community students and teachers. In Lebanon and Jordan, an informal quota (30%) is reserved for members of the host community, who are involved as students together with refugees, with the aim of promoting social cohesion between the two communities. In the future, Kiron Lebanon plans to implement sessions and forums moderated by tutors recruited among refugee and host community graduates. Additionally, one of the Lebanese interviewees stated the need to tailor the courses to practical issues faced by refugees in that specific country.
- **In Germany,** because of financial restrictions, the initiative is moving away completely from having an offline presence, and will solely focus on the online. However, offline events, such as welcome weekends and exam preparation, have proven effective in promoting community building and social cohesion between participants. Additionally, Kiron providers in Germany have recognised the difficulties faced by many digitally illiterate refugees to keep up with the online courses, and the need to support their motivation through mentorship opportunities. This is why, in Germany, Kiron is now developing an online mentoring function, and investing in online community building. The aim is to increase students' opportunities to support each other, their sense of belonging and motivation, and reduce their dependency on Kiron's personal support. Kiron Germany also includes female mentors specifically targeting the needs of female students, and mentoring by professionals from different companies, which significantly improves chances for support and integration. However, in Germany the initiative is only dedicated to refugees, and members of the host community are not involved as students, because of restrictions from donors and partners. This limits the potential of the initiative to promote bridging social capital and, thus, social cohesion between the two communities.



## 5.3 Including both refugees and host communities

**Services specifically designed for refugees**, although well intentioned, may end up reinforcing isolation and marginalisation. A digital service specifically targeting refugees makes sense in areas such as the asylum process, or labour market integration, where the situation and needs of refugees structurally differ from those of the broader community. By contrast, in the field of language learning, existing digital resources can be used by refugees as much as anyone else.<sup>335</sup> Digital initiatives can better support social cohesion outcomes when they target both refugees and host community members, which affects design components such as the language(s) in which the initiative is offered, and the integration of face-to-face elements into project activities.

### Language

**Language** is an important factor to take into account to make initiatives more inclusive. In **Turkey**, **I'mappy** provides content in Turkish, Arabic and English, thus being able to reach a wider audience. To achieve the same result, the founder of **Gherbetna** mentioned the importance of having both Syrian and Turkish people in the team. At the moment, all the information available on the **Gherbetna** platform is in Arabic, which means that users do not learn Turkish. This also means that Turkish communities are not engaging with the platform. Providing content in both languages would promote intercultural exchange and mutual understanding. In **Germany**, the founder of **Yallah Deutschland** agreed that an initiative providing content in multiple languages is better placed to reach both the refugee and host communities. Both initiatives mentioned that providing information in both languages would require a more diverse staff team, with staff members coming from both communities and having the necessary language skills.

## Face-to-face components

Blended approaches involving face-to-face interaction are key to enhancing bridging social capital, and hence social cohesion. For example, participants in a study about Free Digital Learning (FDL) stressed the importance of adding to the digital component – to be used in isolation – the opportunities to socialise offered by a **classroom environment and physical networking**.<sup>336</sup>

Our fieldwork has identified that **face-to-face components** are the most effective way to expand refugees' social networks and promote social cohesion between the refugees and host community.

In **Germany**, **ReDI** has achieved positive outcomes in terms of social cohesion by regularly organising activities such as community and school events, company visits and career fairs, and providing face-to-face mentorship opportunities. In **Turkey**, a blended approach has been suggested by the users of **Taalum** as a way to favour physical interaction between users – both entrepreneurs and potential customers – and expand their social networks. In **Lebanon**, the users of **Kiron** declared their preference for face-to-face interaction over online forums, as a more immediate way to communicate and a more effective way to build relationships, clarify doubts and discuss with the group. Moreover, face-to-face tutoring and mentoring opportunities are often needed to get immediate feedback and sustain the motivation for online learning. This is shown in the quotes below.

*“Meeting face to face would be very helpful. Like a periodic meeting or an event – once a month for example – it would be nice to meet other students and make friends.”*

User of Kiron, Lebanon

<sup>335</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>336</sup>Colucci et al. Free digital learning.

*“Students could be encouraged to apply social cohesion principles through blended (online and offline) and action-focused learning practices; for example, coming up with joint projects that bring together students around an issue.”*

User of Kiron, Lebanon

In the case of HOPES, one of the Syrian interviewees stressed the importance of involving both refugees and host communities in the activities, to break negative stereotypes and spur social cohesion. This is highlighted in the quote below.

*“This course should target both Syrians and Turkish students. We need to get in touch with Turkish students so that we can [get to] know each other. We would like to present our culture and ourselves the way we deserve. We are much different than the media portrays us.”*

User of HOPES, Turkey

In **Germany, Eed be Eed** has successfully integrated digital and face-to-face components to foster social cohesion between communities, as discussed in Case study box 8 below.

### Case study box 8 – Eed be Eed

#### Eed be Eed<sup>337</sup>

**Category:** Facilitators. **Country:** Germany.

**Key objectives and activities:** Eed Be Eed (EbE) has two main objectives: to provide information to refugees and asylum seekers who have recently arrived in Berlin, regarding services available in the city, as well as information on German cultural norms; and to foster the integration of refugees in Berlin by connecting them with the host population. In order to achieve these objectives, EbE implements a series of activities: an online platform and a printed magazine, which provides news and information regarding the rights and services available to refugees in Germany; Arabic art and cultural festivals in the cities of Berlin and Essen, which bring refugee and host communities together to learn about each other; and the Yallah Media Academy, which provides those that wish to work in the journalism field with the opportunity to gain key media skills and to interact with journalists.

**Implementers:** The project was initiated by a refugee, and recruits refugees, asylum seekers and others who had worked in the field of media, and originate from Syria, Iraq and Egypt. The project also works closely with governmental and non-governmental actors to gather the information needed.

**Target group:** Initially EbE solely targeted Arabic-speaking refugees, but it has now shifted its focus and has started also targeting the host population in Germany.

#### **Pathways to social cohesion:**

EbE promotes social cohesion through the following domains:

- **Social relationships:** The events and workshops organised by EbE allow host communities and refugees to interact and build trust.
- **Employment:** Staff members of EbE are able to find long-term employment in the media field as journalists due to their participation in the initiative. Furthermore, refugees are gaining important skills and networks due to the Yallah Media Academy, which could help them find jobs.

<sup>337</sup>Eed be Eed. <http://eedbeed.de/>.



## Case study box 8 – Eed be Eed

### Added value of being digital:

- **Reach:** Through the digital means, EbE is able to reach a large number of people.
- **Real-time services:** The use of an online platform allows EbE to provide updated and reliable information and news.

**A blended, multi-pronged approach to social cohesion:** In the case of EbE, the digital and physical spaces are interconnected and both important to achieve social cohesion between refugees and host communities. The digital platform allows the project to reach a wider audience and provide it with the information needed to integrate into German society, but the printed magazine is equally important to reach those that might have problems accessing the internet. Through the physical space (i.e. Arabic art and cultural festivals, Yallah Media Academy), the project offers the attendees the opportunity to get to know each other, expand their networks and build trust. Digital means and physical interaction thus reinforce each other to promote intercultural exchange, mutual understanding and labour market integration.

## 5.4 Sustainability

Sustainability of digital initiatives, and their ability to grow, consolidate and more effectively support social cohesion outcomes, relies on funding, partnerships with online initiatives and integration into existing systems.

### Funding

Having access to **reliable sources of financing** is a key factor in enabling the sustainability of digital initiatives, and their ability to expand reach and coverage of locations.<sup>338 339</sup> A small minority of digital initiatives targeting refugees have succeeded in securing a stable, long-term financial stream. Digital initiatives usually rely on sources of funding such as personal investments and unpaid labour of their founders (rarely sustainable), financial and in-kind donations from businesses, foundations and NGOs,<sup>340</sup> grants, social business models, as well as government funding.<sup>342</sup> In most cases, this is still not enough to ensure financial sustainability, limits the scope of the activities, and forces many initiatives to rely on **volunteer support**, which exposes them to high levels of fluctuation and turnover.

In **Turkey**, limited funding prevented **I'mappy** administrators translating the app content into different languages, and is now forcing

the initiative to end, after three years of operation. A key challenge for **Taalum** is that the initial six-month period of funding from the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has now ended. In the short term, the implementers need to find another donor, but in the long term, they hope they will be able to secure fees from successful businesses. A similar issue is faced by **Gherbetna**, which was initially funded by Syrian companies in exchange for advertising, and is currently funded by the Turkish telecommunications company Turk Telekom, which relies on **Gherbetna** to reach the Arabic-speaking community in Turkey. In the short term, this sponsorship can work, but in the long term, the initiative aims to achieve financial independence.

In **Germany**, **Eed be Eed** and **Yallah Deutschland** are/were fully comprised of volunteers who in many cases ended up leaving the initiative, as unpaid positions are not sustainable in the long term. Similarly, the majority of **ReDI** funding comes from corporate partnerships, but the initiative has not yet managed to achieve financial stability, which limits its capacity to expand to other locations.

**Start with a Friend** and **Kiron**, in **Germany**, are two of the few initiatives that received funding from the government, respectively

<sup>338</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>339</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>340</sup>Often through crowdfunding.

<sup>341</sup>For example, Ashoka, Social Impact Lab, Google Impact Challenge.

<sup>342</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and from the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). These are grants that extend over several years and gave these initiatives enough stability to professionalise their teams.<sup>343</sup> These initiatives combine a salaried core team with a broader network of volunteers who can provide support when it comes to expanding operations to other cities or contact with the target group.<sup>344</sup> However,

relying on government funding can subject initiatives to several restrictions, as further mentioned below. An alternative to ensure sustainability is for initiatives to develop business models that enable them to generate their own income in the long term.<sup>345 346</sup> This is the case of **DOT**, in **Lebanon**, as illustrated in the box below (Case study box 9). However, this is not suitable for all types of initiatives.

### Case study box 9 – Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT)

#### Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT)<sup>347</sup>

**Category:** Means and markers. **Country:** Lebanon.

**Key objectives and activities:** Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) aims to build a youth-led movement of social innovators who have the tools, knowledge and networks to improve the education system and address community needs through digital solutions. Through free courses and practical learning, DOT teaches young participants digital, entrepreneurial and soft skills and assists them in the identification and development of solutions to community issues. DOT also trains teachers and school administrators to integrate digital skills into the school environment.

**Implementers:** DOT was founded in 2001 and is headquartered in Ottawa, Canada. In Lebanon, a DOT team has been operating since 2003.

**Target group:** DOT targets Lebanese youth as well as Palestinian and Syrian refugees. The focus is on low income groups residing in rural areas, informal urban settlements, or refugee camps, and attending public schools and non-elite universities. DOT has reached 9,794 young people so far, 65% of which are women.

#### **Pathways to social cohesion:**

DOT promotes social cohesion through the following domains:

- **Employment:** DOT provides young participants with digital skills that are transferable and useful in their daily life and improve their employability. By partnering with private companies, the project has managed to employ 160 young people in more than 40 projects requiring digital skills. The project is particularly beneficial for women. Activities take place within the community, enabling women to get out of their homes but still enjoy the benefits of a close, safe environment. At DOT they can socialise, gain new skills and get the opportunity to start their own business, with positive gains in terms of labour market integration and social cohesion.
- **Social relationships:** By engaging young people from both refugee and host communities in the training centres and through group activities, DOT managed to establish a community that brings together teachers and students from different backgrounds and nationalities. This encouraged interaction and intercultural exchange,

<sup>343</sup>Ibid.

<sup>344</sup>Ibid.

<sup>345</sup>Ibid.

<sup>346</sup>Colucci et al. Free digital learning.

<sup>347</sup>Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT). <https://lebanon.dotrust.org/>

### Case study box 9 – Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT)

and people started organising activities beyond the course, thus fostering bridging social capital. DOT is being effective in promoting social cohesion not only between refugees and the host community, but between rival Lebanese communities as well. In Tripoli, the training centre is located between two communities with high levels of deprivation and unemployment and with entrenched armed sectarian clashes that are related to the Syrian conflict. Tensions are so high that the training centre has two separate entrances, one on each community's side. Joining the courses fundamentally changed how young people on both sides relate to each other, as they have started learning together during the course and became friends, to the extent that they are now willing to work together as part of BOT (see below) and community clashes have decreased.

- **Citizenship:** The project supports refugees and host community members to work together to understand and address community needs through digital solutions. This fosters social cohesion by improving the living conditions of different social groups within the community, and enhancing participants' understanding of rights and engagement in social action, which is deeply embedded in digital skills learning.

#### Added value of being digital:

- **Usefulness of digital skills:** Rather than a generic digital skills curriculum, DOT digital skills courses focus on the identification of and solution to a social issue of interest to the participants. Young people use the digital skills gained through the programme to develop innovative solutions to social problems affecting local communities, including mobile apps for career counselling, cancer awareness, anti-bullying and blood donation. Digital solutions such as online courses and consultancy, gamification, simulation and interactive systems are employed to improve the education system and the way teachers and students interact.

**A resourceful approach to funding:** Over time, DOT has managed to secure funding from different sources (e.g. EU, USAID), and has managed to build a network that brings together more than 50 governmental, non-governmental and private sector organisations. They provide DOT with critical resources, including funding, business and industry knowledge, and the local support needed to deliver their programmes. However, being financially dependent on donors imposes practical limits, for example, determining what communities DOT works with. To reach financial sustainability, DOT is now evolving from a grant-based to an income-generating model, through the following activities:

- The Organisational Digital Transformation (ODT) is a digital training that DOT offers to private schools, NGOs, and municipalities that are able to pay for it.
- Bridge, Outsource, Transform (BOT) has been established as a for-profit 'sister' company of DOT. BOT provides microwork for youth through digital services related to call centre support, transcription, data collection, digital archiving, data cleaning, etc. While DOT is responsible for the outreach and training of participants, BOT is responsible for sales, and favours youth employment in private companies.

Total revenues in 2018 were USD 100K, while USD 300K is expected in 2019. Of the total revenues, an average of 50–55% goes to youth wages. The rest covers the project's daily operations and logistics. DOT is also partnering with Google to develop online courses as a way to save on teacher salaries.

## Partnerships between digital interventions

Achieving positive, long-term outcomes in terms of social cohesion also depends on the ability of existing digital initiatives to **coordinate their activities and resources**, and exploit complementarities. However, networking analysis undertaken by Mason et al. in relation to digital initiatives active in **Germany** has revealed that many of these projects are not aware of each other. Even when they are aware, different trajectories and limited capacity can make collaboration difficult. Other obstacles include different dataset formats, teams located in different places, and different and sometimes conflicting attitudes and approaches towards project activities. However, there have been some successful cases of partnership. In **Germany**, the **LAGeSo Roundtables** serves as a networking forum where people working in the field of digital refugee projects can get to know each other, and it has started a dialogue on the topic with a relevant public authority. Similarly, **Helfer-Allianz** is a group created in 2016 to enable the providers of digital initiatives to share knowledge and look for ways to pool resources and communicate a unified message to the press and public.

In **Lebanon**, **DOT** tends to partner with organisations that provide complementary services, such as coding schools, start-up bootcamps, as well as **Girls Got It**, an initiative that unites five NGOs aiming aim to promote STEM subjects among girls. **Kiron's** model is essentially based on a partnership model, as the initiative provides high quality online courses accessible through well-established platforms such as Coursera.

In **Turkey**, **I'mappy** Turkish providers benefit from partnerships with likeminded organisations that are implementing the app in their respective countries. Through regular stakeholder and partners' meetings, the implementing partners share learning about how to face similar challenges and promote migrant integration. Platforms like Taalum, Gherbetna and Harabik are all used by refugees in the country as sources of information. There might be an opportunity to better integrate and join up existing platforms working in this area.

## Integration with existing systems

The potential of digital initiatives to promote social cohesion fundamentally lies in their ability to **integrate into the established landscape and become part of the integration system**. This could be done by partnering with the government, the private sector and well-established NGOs, and complementing existing non-digital services.<sup>352</sup> Partnering with public agencies or joining more established NGOs is particularly important for digital initiatives to achieve institutionalisation and financial stability, while contributing to the effectiveness of the services offered by these actors. The table below shows a number of advantages that digital initiatives derive from the development **a broad network of partners**.<sup>353</sup>

<sup>348</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.

<sup>349</sup>Ibid.

<sup>350</sup>Ibid.

<sup>351</sup>Ibid.

<sup>352</sup>Ibid.

<sup>353</sup>Ibid.

**Table 9: Initiatives and partnerships**

| Initiative  | Partnership and integration example   |
|---|---|
| <b>Germany</b>  |   |
| <b>GoVolunteer</b> <sup>354</sup> and <b>Start with a Friend</b> <sup>355</sup> | These projects benefit from a network that spans all sectors, including public sector organisations, NGOs, companies, foundations and welfare organisations. Different partners contribute with their relative strengths, with large and established organisations providing resources, NGOs providing know-how and support with regard to interacting with the target group, and start-ups offering inspiration for innovative ways of working.  |
| <b>Devugees</b> <sup>356</sup>  | Devugees is the only coding school that has succeeded in becoming a certified provider of vocational training in Germany. <sup>357</sup> It is financed by the Jobcenter, the German employment agency. This successful collaboration was partly due to the fact that one of the project members had prior experience in further education and how to navigate the certification process. <sup>358</sup>  |
| <b>Integreat</b>  | The information app was initially launched in the city of Augsburg, and then adopted by other municipalities due to the communication between municipal governments, as well as the positive feedback the app received from other NGOs and the media. <sup>359</sup>  |
| <b>ReDI</b>   | Through partnerships with IT companies such as Cisco and Microsoft, the initiative has been able to secure funding opportunities, expand course offer and increase job opportunities for students.  |
| <b>Lebanon</b>  |   |
| <b>DOT</b>  | Partnering with local associations and the Social Service Centre – run by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs – helps the project with promotion and recruitment activities, while through a partnership with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), DOT managed to access 134 public and semi-public schools.  |
| <b>Kiron Lebanon</b>  | <p>The initiative is part of the Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access<sup>360</sup> and aims to provide access to higher education to refugees and locals in Lebanon and Jordan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each partner offers a different range of courses and learning modalities, to provide students with more diverse and flexible options.</li> <li>• Through agreements with local universities in Lebanon, Jordan and Germany, Kiron allows students to collect credits that they can then use to complete university courses.</li> <li>• Partnership with government agencies provides the initiative with financial support, while partnerships with companies enabled Kiron to expand course offer and students' job opportunities.</li> </ul> |

<sup>354</sup>GoVolunteer. <https://govolunteer.com/de/>.<sup>355</sup>Start with a Friend. <https://start-with-a-friend.de/>.<sup>356</sup>Devugees. <https://digitalcareerinstitute.org/en/>.<sup>357</sup>Mason et al. Digital routes to integration.<sup>358</sup>Ibid.<sup>359</sup>Rosenbaum et al. Integreat.<sup>360</sup>This is a partnership between Kiron, King's College London, American University of Beirut, Al al-Bayt University Jordan and Future Learn.

**Table 9: Initiatives and partnerships**

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| <b>WFP/AUB</b> | The project relies on the partnership between the World Food Programme (WFP), which is responsible for project set up and evaluation, and the American University of Beirut (AUB), which designed and delivered the digital skills and English language courses based on AUB existing curricula. Case study box 10 provides further detail.  |
| <b>Turkey</b>  |  |
| <b>I'mappy</b> | Providers of the initiative are currently trying to involve the government, and in particular the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), to avoid duplicating existing activities and try to achieve long-term sustainability. DGMM has invited I'mappy and other NGOs to share their experiences in running their programmes, with the aim of understanding how they can be developed in the long run. |
| <b>Taalum</b>  | Being led by the Syrian Economic Forum enabled Taalum to build a strategic partnership with the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce, which in turn allows students with the initiative to obtain recognised certificates.  |

Nonetheless, there are challenges to integrating digital initiatives into existing systems and developing partnerships. Relying on public funds and foundations raises several obligations and formal restrictions, as well as resource and time requirements to submit applications and accountability reports.<sup>361</sup> This is not always compatible with the agile approach that characterises digital initiatives, especially when dealing with refugee issues. **ReDI**, for example, is not yet accredited by the German employment agencies as a provider of vocational training. Involving the government could support the sustainability and scale-up of the programme, but this would also introduce requirements for reporting and compliance with government regulation which requires additional labour and resources.

In addition, it is difficult for public institutions and NGOs to assess whether a certain project is high quality and sustainable, which makes it difficult for them to take on the risk of working with and supporting these initiatives.<sup>362</sup> A successful case of partnership between a digital initiative, a university and the Lebanese government is **WFP/AUB**, described below (Case study box 10). However, it is worth noting that the reason this partnership is successful is that the digital initiative is already embedded in a well-respected humanitarian actor (WFP) with a large organisational infrastructure, existing contacts and established partnerships. This is not the case for other digital initiatives that are run by small, recently started CSOs or NGOs.

<sup>361</sup>Rosenbaum et al. Integreat.

<sup>362</sup>Conference on digital solutions for refugees 2017.

**Case study box 10 – World Food Programme/American University of Beirut (WFP/AUB)****World Food Programme/American University of Beirut (WFP/AUB)**

**Category:** Means and markers. **Country:** Lebanon.

**Key objectives and activities:** The Digital Skills Training project led by the World Food Programme (WFP) provides refugee and host community young people with digital and language skills training, thus promoting their social, educational and economic inclusion.

**Implementers:** The project was created in 2016 by the WFP Innovation Accelerator located in Munich. In Lebanon, WFP established the project and now leads on project implementation, in partnership with AUB that is responsible for curriculum design and training provision.

**Target group:** The project targets both young Lebanese nationals and Syrian refugees (aged 16–35) who are ‘vulnerable’ according to the criteria defined by WFP in partnership with the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). In practice, participants are generally in their mid-twenties, counting around 70% Syrians and 30% Lebanese. The project has so far reached 2,200 participants.

**Pathways to social cohesion:**

WFP/AUB promotes social cohesion through the following domains:

- **Education:** As previously mentioned, the project improves participants’ employability by providing them with digital skills. The project appealed to and achieved positive outcomes for women in particular, who represent 70% of the participants. The credibility of project partners reassured the families of these women, who were thus enabled to attend project activities. Additionally, women have a higher rate of unemployment, and were attracted by the opportunity to learn skills that can be useful to start their own businesses and integrate into the labour market. Learning English is also important to increase access to the education system for refugee women and their children.
- **Social relationships:** Through joint participation in the course and explicit efforts made by the teachers, Lebanese and Syrian students who were initially reluctant to socialise with each other managed to bond and create a community that now extends beyond the course. Childcare has proved to work as a bonding factor between participants, as women bring their children in class and receive support from coordinators and other participants to take care of them.

**Added value of being digital:**

- **Usefulness of digital skills:** The project provides participants, who come from extremely impoverished backgrounds or areas of conflict and are usually digitally illiterate, with digital skills that can significantly improve their employability.
- **Reach:** The project used Facebook to create and support a wide network of students and alumni, and advertise education and training opportunities available for young adults in Lebanon.



### Case study box 10 – World Food Programme/American University of Beirut (WFP/AUB)

**An effective partnership model:** The project relies on the partnership between the WFP, which is responsible for project set up and evaluation, and the AUB, which designed and delivered the digital skills and English language courses based on AUB existing curricula. The project model is designed to be transferred and implemented in other WFP country offices, and is currently being implemented in Iraq after having been adapted to the local context. Outreach activities are conducted in collaboration with the Lebanese Organisation for Studies and Training (LOST) and the MOSA, with which WFP defined the eligibility criteria according to the MOSA National Poverty Targeting Programme, the nationwide programme to support vulnerable Lebanese families through cash assistance. The project allows Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese to learn digital skills and receive cash assistance to cover their basic food needs and transport on a debit card that is used by all humanitarian agencies – including the WFP – as part of different cash assistance models. Partnering with well-established and credible actors such as AUB and MOSA has enabled the project to reach a wider audience, including women.

## 5.5 Socio-political and economic environment

Finally, a factor that has been mentioned often in our fieldwork and throughout the report, and that substantially affects the potential of digital initiatives to deliver social cohesion outcomes, is the wider socio-political context in the country of operation. On the one hand, this relates to integration policies, the attitudes of the host society towards newcomers and labour market conditions,<sup>263</sup> all shaping the environment in which digital initiatives operate, and their likelihood of achieving positive results in terms of social cohesion. On the other hand, this relates to the government's disposition towards these initiatives, and its willingness and support for creating a legal and financial environment for them to thrive in.

## Labour market conditions

The ability of digital initiatives to **promote employment opportunities**, for example, can be restricted by a stagnant economic environment, restrictive government regulations and socio-cultural divisions; limitations that are not exclusive to digital initiatives. In **Lebanon**, local companies contract **DOT** to undertake projects that rely on the graduates' microwork skills. Because of restrictions imposed by the Lebanese government and cultural issues, in most cases these companies prefer to employ Lebanese rather than Syrian workers in the projects. Similarly, **WFP/AUB** and **Kiron** providers reported that because of the Lebanese state ban on work for Syrian nationals, the two initiatives are limited in their ability to advertise and promote increased employment opportunities for its refugee participants, as revealed by the quotes below.

<sup>263</sup>Alencar. Refugee integration and social media.



*“[Employability] is a very sensitive issue. Kiron cannot provide jobs, or support to find a job. It is hard for refugees to find legal jobs in Lebanon and they tend to work illegally. We can only provide them with learning channels and transferable skills building.”*

Provider of Kiron, Lebanon

*“The [Kiron] model might be more useful in France or Germany where graduates can get into the labour market. It is not useful here in Lebanon because of the disconnection between education and future employment prospects. It is important to get educated and gain exposure, but if there is no strategy for future work plans and there is no outlet for work, then it does not help. Kiron and all other NGOs do not provide any employment opportunities because of economic and political reasons that forbid them to do it.”*

User of Kiron, Lebanon

Furthermore, refugees are not allowed to own businesses officially in Lebanon, and Syrians face severe struggles to open bank accounts, which prevents business owners from applying for and getting loans.<sup>364</sup> A similar limitation applies to **Turkey**, where the effectiveness of **Taalum** in assisting Syrian refugee entrepreneurs is limited by the fact that Syrians face significant obstacles in obtaining loans from Turkish banks.

An additional challenge that is related to the wider country context, and limits the social cohesion potential of digital initiatives in the three countries under study, is the fact that online degrees are still **not officially recognised by the national governments**. Lacking the authority to provide official certificates, digital initiatives are restricted in their ability to enable refugees' integration into the education system and local labour market. In **Germany** and **Lebanon**, Kiron

tries to compensate for this by enabling its students to get credits that are reusable at academic institutions it partners with, thus facilitating the achievement of higher education qualifications and employment opportunities going forward. In **Turkey**, **Taalum's** partnership with Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce enabled the initiative to provide students with recognised certificates. However, to ensure the full and long-term integration of refugees within society, government intervention is needed. In **Germany**, for example, the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB)<sup>365</sup> and the Ministry of Education (BMBF)<sup>366</sup> are developing new methods for assessing and certifying skills, which could help address this issue.

### Attitudes of the host society

Negative public opinion has already been mentioned as a substantial obstacle to social cohesion, which digital initiatives by themselves might not be able to overcome. Users and providers of digital initiatives operating in **Lebanon**, for example, have commented that clashes between Lebanese nationals and refugees are so deeply entrenched that the potential of digital initiatives to foster social cohesion between the two communities is promising but limited, as illustrated by the quotes below.

*“Social divisions related to nationals and refugees in Lebanon are deeply entrenched, especially with the history of Lebanese and Syrian and Palestinian communities. So the online element is limited when participants do not have the education or the reflex to apply what they learn online to their offline daily lives.”*

User of Kiron, Lebanon

<sup>364</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on.

<sup>365</sup>BIBB. Recognizing vocational qualifications for refugees.

<sup>366</sup>BMBF. Bericht zum Anerkennungsgesetz 2016.

In an attempt to address this issue and promote peace building and social cohesion, blended models of learning combining digital and face-to-face components and favouring interaction in the classroom might achieve good results in terms of community building. This is shown by initiatives such as **WFP/AUB, Kiron Lebanon** and **DOT**, and confirmed by the quote below.

*“At the start of the cycle, participants self-segregate so Lebanese and Syrians sit in different parts of the classroom, then later on they mingle and forge friendships. They also organise trips together and reported feeling like a big family.”*

User of WFP, Lebanon

The quote resonates with a statement from the CARE report, according to which: “when Syrian refugees and Lebanese have had the opportunity to get to know each other, to share their daily struggles and learn together, it has led to a reduction of tensions, and has the potential to create more genuine and sustainable bonds.”<sup>367</sup> Given that negative public opinion towards refugees is an issue in **Germany** and **Turkey** as well, blended approaches could prove effective in these contexts, as a way to improve attitudes of the host society towards refugees.

## Government approach towards digital initiatives

To operate effectively, digital initiatives need an **environment that recognises their potential role and is supportive of their activities**, by promoting an enabling legal environment, developing mechanisms for financial sustainability and including providers in the decision-making process.<sup>368</sup> Policymakers should explore how to take

optimal benefit of the new opportunities that are being offered by digital tools and initiatives in terms of social cohesion, first of all by increasing access to digital technologies and reducing the digital divide.<sup>369</sup> However, not enough has been done in this sense so far.<sup>370</sup>

In **Germany**, the government has started to use digital means to improve the reach and effectiveness of its services. This includes the website **Recognition in Germany**, managed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and offered in nine languages (including Arabic), which has launched a mobile app that provides information on qualification recognition, as well as education and training opportunities in Germany.<sup>371</sup> The Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI) launched an **Arrival App** in 2016, which provides newcomers with information on language learning and asylum procedures.<sup>372</sup> The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB), in turn, leads the website **Qualiboxx – Portal for the school-job transition**, which has introduced a section providing information on VET opportunities to refugees and asylum seekers as well as to their German-speaking mentors.<sup>373</sup>

In addition, in 2016, BMI and the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF), together with Initiative D21,<sup>374</sup> betterplace lab<sup>375</sup> and OpenTransfer,<sup>376</sup> created a platform that promotes exchange and networking between digital initiatives. This led to the organisation of **two Conferences on Digital Solutions for Refugees**, which took place in Berlin in June 2016 and June 2017, respectively. The main issues the conferences aimed to address were the integration of digital refugee initiatives into the established structures of the public sector and civil

<sup>367</sup>Care. Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on, p. 10.

<sup>368</sup>OECD. Improving social inclusion at the local level through the social economy.

<sup>369</sup>Verdegem. Social media for digital and social inclusion.

<sup>370</sup>Gillespie et al. Mapping refugee media journeys.

<sup>371</sup>Anerkennung in Deutschland. Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB). Available at: [https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/media/Flyer\\_App.pdf](https://www.anerkennung-in-deutschland.de/media/Flyer_App.pdf).

<sup>372</sup>Überaus. Flüchtlinge - Qualifizierung und Arbeitsmarktintegration. Available at: <https://ueberaus.de/wws/9.php#/wws/dossier-fluechtlinge.php>.

<sup>373</sup>Ibid.

<sup>374</sup>Initiative D21. <https://initiated21.de>.

<sup>375</sup>Betterplace lab. <https://betterplace-lab.org>.

<sup>376</sup>OpenTransfer. <https://opentransfer.de>.

society, the ability of these initiatives to meet refugees' needs, and whether and how refugees are providing feedback on these services. The conferences discussed how ministries can better support these initiatives, including provision of funding sources and networking, advisory services and reducing bureaucratic hurdles.<sup>377</sup>

The governments of **Turkey** and **Lebanon** have not been equally active in this sense. However, in Turkey, **I'mappy** administrators are trying to involve the government, and in particular the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), to avoid duplicating existing activities and try to achieve long-term sustainability. DGMM has invited I'mappy and other NGOs to share their experiences in running their programmes, with the aim of understanding how they can be developed in the long run. In Lebanon, **DOT** has included in its 2018–2021 strategy the objective of joining an advocacy network that brings together digital initiatives active in the field of internet governance and rights. The goal of the network is to advocate with policymakers on the need to change laws and regulations, to make them more supportive of digital initiatives.

<sup>377</sup>Conference on digital solutions for refugees 2017.

# 6.0 Conclusions

The research comes at an opportune time, given the significant increase in migration and displacement. Digital initiatives have been promoted as a key tool with the potential to support refugees and social cohesion. However, substantial gaps still limit our understanding of the issue. The research contributes to the existing literature on digital refugee projects and their potential for social cohesion, with the overarching aim of supporting refugees with the strongest possible opportunities for being treated equally and well and having meaningful opportunities during their time in refuge.

**Social cohesion** can be seen as the ultimate aim of two-way social integration which, in the refugee context, describes the process through which the refugees and host community engage, negotiate cultural differences and avoid conflict. By social integration, this report means supporting the integration of refugees in their time of refuge to allow them to be included within the social domain, rather than supporting the permanent settlement and integration of refugees and asylum seekers. Social integration is elaborated using Ager and Strang's categorisation, which relies on four key domains, namely means and markers (employment, education, housing and health),

foundations (citizenship and rights), social connections and facilitators (language, information and cultural knowledge, safety and security). Advancements in each of these domains support improved social cohesion. For the purposes of this report, digital initiatives have been defined to include digital platforms (mainly websites, mobile apps and social media) and digital skills (analytics, coding, audio-visual production) operating in Germany, Lebanon and Turkey.

A wide body of literature demonstrates that digital initiatives have the potential to support social cohesion. We argue that this is also the case in the refugee context. Digital initiatives offer a number of advantages compared to non-digital initiatives, including accessibility, the ability to cost-efficiently reach a wide audience of users and offer services that are customised and constantly updated. On this basis, they can help address obstacles to social cohesion – affected by each country context – such as legal restrictions, labour market regulation, educational opportunities, public opinion and language capability, among other things. Digital initiatives can support achievements in the four key dimensions of integration (means and markers, foundations, social connections and facilitators), fostering social cohesion as a result. As a result,

digital initiatives also have the potential to support progress against the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular the goals of quality education, decent work and economic growth, no poverty, gender equality, reduced inequalities and sustainable cities and communities.

Nonetheless, there are also potential negative outcomes and limitations to the use of digital initiatives. Digital initiatives can result in increased competition between the refugees and host communities, reduce incentives for engaging with the host community, and reinforce marginalisation of refugees, especially initiatives that target refugees specifically. Without due consideration of different refugee needs and capabilities, and reflection on accessibility issues, digital initiatives can also widen existing inequalities. Country-specific policy contexts need to be considered, to understand how they can mitigate or worsen these limitations and potential negative outcomes.

Based on this conceptual framework, the report presents **findings** from fieldwork conducted in Germany, Lebanon and Turkey, where we have explored what digital platforms and digital skills are being utilised to support social cohesion, and how they are doing so. The three countries differ significantly in their approach to managing and processing refugee and asylum seeker experiences and claims, which results in specific challenges and opportunities for integration and social cohesion. The four headings of social

integration have been useful to describe the main obstacles to social cohesion faced by refugees in the three countries, and the potential of digital initiatives to address them. Findings from the full list of digital initiatives mapped in the three countries, and from the case studies, have demonstrated the added value of digital initiatives, and their impact on social cohesion through the promotion of education and employment opportunities, the facilitation of interaction and community building with the host community, the provision of information on the local systems and culture, and the increased opportunities for refugees to speak up about their experiences and mobilise support, among other things.

The fieldwork has also identified the **factors** that can increase or restrict the potential of digital initiatives to achieve positive results and promote social cohesion, set out in section 5. The following list of factors may be useful for policymakers and implementers to consider during the design and delivery of digital initiatives, to maximise the potential of digital initiatives to support social cohesion and mitigate potential negative outcomes and limitations.

- **Responsiveness to users' needs:** Digital initiatives should listen to and incorporate the specific needs of their target group(s), depending on factors such as age, gender, wealth, educational level, country of origin and stage in the refugee journey, to increase users' access to and use of these initiatives, and the number of refugees who benefit from them. Online and offline promotion activities are key to raise awareness of these initiatives and encourage uptake. Considering options for use where there is poor internet connection (e.g. by offering offline functions), addressing cultural and linguistic barriers, prioritising mobile apps over websites, and linking initiatives with digital means that refugees already access and use (e.g. Facebook and WhatsApp) are additional ways to support accessibility of these initiatives.
- **Including both refugees and the host community:** Including members of both communities within the initiative facilitates opportunities for interaction, understanding and bonding between these two groups, and reduces the risk of further isolating refugees by treating them differently from the rest of the population. Offering content in multiple languages and complementing online with face-to-face components are effective ways to promote inclusiveness. Digital means can offer opportunities for cost savings, flexibility and increased reach, but face-to-face interaction has proved to be a more effective way to overcome inter-racial tensions and combat negative stereotypes.
- **Sustainability:** Sustainability is key for digital initiatives to continue and grow their operations, which can increase their chance to achieve social cohesion outcomes. Diversifying funding sources, developing social business models, building partnerships between each other, as well as with government agencies, civil society and the private sector, are ways to achieve financial sustainability. Partnerships with government agencies and integration of

initiatives into existing systems, including the education system, jobcentres, information centres and platforms can be a way to achieve sustainability and strengthen positive outcomes; for example, by providing users with recognised certificates, internships and networking opportunities.

- **Socio-political and economic environment:** Digital initiatives alone are limited in their potential to foster social cohesion, in the absence of a supportive socio-economic and political environment. Labour market conditions, attitudes of the host society towards refugees and government recognition and support of digital initiatives crucially reinforce or limit the potential of digital initiatives to achieve social cohesion outcomes. To maximise the potential of these initiatives and provide refugees with equal opportunities for participation and engagement in the host country, policymakers should explore how to take optimal advantage of the new opportunities that are being offered by digital tools and initiatives in terms of social cohesion. This includes promoting an enabling legal and financial environment, and increasing refugees' access to digital technologies.

The report points at **blended models of learning and opportunities** as an effective way to promote social cohesion. A systematic comparison between digital and non-digital interventions would have been useful, in terms of their effectiveness to promote social cohesion and value for money. This comparison was outside the scope of this research, but further research could investigate benefits and potential drawbacks of the two modalities and systematically compare between them.

# Annex A: List of Projects

The table below (**Table 2**) summarises some of the existing relevant projects that operate in the three countries analysed in this literature review (Germany, Lebanon and

Turkey). These initiatives are categorised according to country of operation, their category and type. The symbol \* indicates the initiatives selected as in-depth case studies.

**Table 2: Relevant projects<sup>1</sup>**

| Category       | Type / Technology | Name of project | Brief description   |
|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|---|
| <b>Germany</b> |                   |                 |   |
| Facilitators   | Mobile app        | Integreat       | App providing orientation for newly arrived migrants.   |
|                | Platform          | DaFur           | Programme that target both refugees and non-refugees and teaches basic language skills tailored to everyday situations.   |
|                | Mobile app        | Arrival App     | Combines an introduction to the German language with exercises, practical advice about everyday issues, as well as asylum, apprenticeships and jobs.  |
|                | Website           | Qualiboxx       | Website managed by the BIBB that has introduced a section providing information on VET opportunities to refugees and asylum seekers as well as to their German-speaking mentors.  |
|                | Platform          | Eed be Eed*     | Eed be Eed (Arabic for 'hand in hand') is an online media platform that provides news in Arabic for newcomers and refugees. It was created by a Syrian based in Berlin. The project also organises workshops (physical spaces) for those who are interested in arts and journalism, as well as cultural events. |
|                | Website           | Make It German  | Website that provides information and orientation on the German university system for (aspiring and non-aspiring) Syrian university students.   |
|                | Website           | Helfer-Atlas    | Provides information to German nationals on how they can help refugees (through volunteering or financially) and how they can combat prejudice and racism.  |

<sup>1</sup>Sourced from the mapping completed by the experts and betterplace lab. Digital refugee projects. Available at: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1t82LzxBH5GL2HOnEySZE6irLXLAI6rogJ-r8Cf573yo/edit>.



**Table 2: Relevant projects**

|                                       |                            |  |  |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|--|
| Facilitators                          | Platform                   | Refufy                                     | This platform supports cultural exchange between locals and refugees by facilitating the organisation of events.   |
|                                       | Platform                   | Yallah Deutschland                         | Platform that provides news and information tailored to refugees and those interested in refugee issues.   |
|                                       | Mobile app                 | Feid                                       | The main aims of the mobile application are to: 1. Help Arabic-speaking people to navigate Berlin; 2. Inform them about cultural and educational opportunities in the cities. Therefore, the app can also bridge intercultural exchange between the host community and the refugees. Feid also organises Syrian cooking classes (physical space).                              |
|                                       | Mobile app                 | Helpu                                      | This app helps connect refugees and volunteers through a GPS device thereby allowing them to communicate and/or meet.  |
|                                       | Mobile app                 | iconary                                    | This app contains a dictionary conceptualised for refugees that allows them to easily learn their first words in German through the use of icons and voice output.   |
|                                       | Blockchain                 | Taqanu                                     | It is a financial ecosystem that enables equal opportunities to access finance.  |
| Facilitators/<br>Means and<br>markers | Mobile app                 | RefuShe                                    | This mobile app provides support (psychological, such as counselling, as well as physical, such as information on where female shelters are located) for refugee women. The app also provides the refugee women with information on their rights in Germany as well as the opportunity to interact with the facilities and other women in the same situation (physical space). |
|                                       | Platform                   | Kiron*                                     | Kiron uses an innovative combination of online and offline learning to provide refugees with access to higher education.   |
| Means and<br>markers                  | Digital skills<br>provider | Devugees                                   | The Digital Career Institute implements with Devugees a digital skills training programme for refugees who are interested in a technical qualification for the German labour market.   |
|                                       | Digital skills<br>provider | ReDI: School<br>of Digital<br>Integration* | Programme teaching coding skills to refugees and promoting networking opportunities to increase their employability.   |
|                                       | Digital skills<br>provider | CodeDoor                                   | Programme to teach refugees programming and web development skills, and provide them with workspace and mentoring.   |
|                                       | Digital skills<br>provider | Frauenloop                                 | Programme training refugees and non-refugees as programmers.   |

**Table 2: Relevant projects**

|                    |                         |                          |  |
|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Means and markers  | Digital skills provider | Refugees on Rails        | Programme teaching refugees programming skills and providing them with digital infrastructure and networking opportunities.  |
|                    | Platform                | Chance for Science       | This platform connects scientists (who are also refugees) with German research institutions. The aim is to promote exchange of knowledge between users.  |
|                    | Platform                | Check.work               | The platform intends to aid refugees find employment by matching them with targeted placements in the German labour market.  |
|                    | Platform                | Ipso e-care              | This platform provides psychological support to refugees as well as trains them to become psychological counsellors (if they wish to do so).   |
|                    | Portal and mobile app   | DaFür                    | E-learning portal that teaches refugees German.  |
| Social connections | Mobile app              | Speakfree                | This app connect refugees with the local community in order to incentivise exchange of information and networking. Additionally, the app surpasses language barriers as it entails automatic instant translation.  |
|                    | Platform                | Bunt& Verbindlich        | The platform aims to connect those who want to make a donation with organisations, companies, initiatives, organisations working with refugees.  |
|                    | Platform                | Hand in Hand             | This platform aims to provide financial help to those who need it by coordinating local authorities, institutions, organisations, companies, association, people, etc.   |
|                    | Platform                | WeConnect                | This platform helps coordinate volunteer work.   |
|                    | Platform                | Start with a friend      | This platform connects refugees with the local community in order for them to create a relationship of friendship.   |
| <b>Lebanon</b>     |                         |                          |  |
| Facilitators       | Mobile app              | Dalili                   | The Dalili smartphone application provides up-to-date information on food prices and fosters competition among shops to offer better prices. Refugee families use Dalili to save money when buying their favourite foods, and can provide feedback to shopkeepers on how to improve their offer. |
|                    | Social media            | I am a Syrian in Lebanon | Facebook group acting as one-stop shop for information for refugees seeking help with topics ranging from how to report abuse to accessing the services and assistance provided by UNHCR and its partners.   |

**Table 2: Relevant projects**

|                   |                         |   |  |
|-------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| Means and markers | Platform                | Kiron*  | Kiron uses an innovative combination of online and offline learning to provide refugees with access to higher education.   |
|                   | Digital skills provider | World Food Programme/<br>American University of Beirut* | The Digital Skills Training project led by WFP provides refugee and host community young people with digital and language skills training.   |
|                   | Miscellaneous           | Youth Innovation Lab Network                            | This project empowers marginalised Lebanese and refugee youth in Lebanon, aged 14 to 24, encouraging them to become positively involved in the society they live in. Funds digital initiatives such as Injaz, Girls Got It and DOT activities.   |
|                   | Platform                | Relief Centre   | A MOOC course where participants learn the basics of community-based research by implementing the citizen science methodology used by the RELIEF Centre in Lebanon.  |
|                   | Platform                | Empact  | Empact, formerly known as Tech for Food, provides digital skills through a tailored vocational training programme. Participants receive a six-week introduction to the basics of information technology, which is then followed by six weeks of advanced training.   |
|                   | Platform                | Impact Lab  | A training programme designed to support unemployed Lebanese and refugee youth by helping them develop innovative, income-generating solutions to problems in their communities.   |
|                   | Website                 | Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT)*                        | The project mobilises the potential of young people and the power of technology in Lebanon by supporting young leaders to transform the education system through #EdTech (education technology); developing the digital entrepreneurship skills of young people and Palestinian and Syrian refugees; and supporting young college and university graduates to become social innovators that apply digital solutions to solve community challenges. |
|                   | Website                 | Girls got It  | This joint initiative brings together five active Lebanese NGOs: the Lebanese League for Women in Business (LLWB), Arab Women in Computing (ArabWIC), Women in Technology (WIT), Women in Engineering (WIE) and Digital Opportunity trust (DOT). It aims to break the cultural stereotypes that surround women in STEM subjects by exposing young females to essential technology skills.  |

**Table 2: Relevant projects**

|                   |            |   |   |
|-------------------|------------|---|---|
| Means and markers | Website    | INJAZ                                     | Through a one-month intensive entrepreneurship training programme, participants learn to develop key skills such as innovative thinking, business planning, marketing and communication and are supported in coming up with innovative solutions to address some of their community's most pressing needs and challenges.   |
|                   | Website    | International Education Association (IEA) | The project enhances learning and teaching processes through the effective use of digital technologies so that educators and youth acquire 21st-century skills and become productive members of society. Among young people, the project promotes creative, entrepreneurial and technological skills. Among educators, it promotes transformational, active and inclusive pedagogies.   |
| <b>Turkey</b>     |            |   |   |
| Facilitators      | Mobile app | I'mappy*                                  | I'MAPPY is an integration map through which young refugees can access basic information about the asylum process, opportunities for socialisation as well as language lessons. Information is provided by organisations that work with young refugees, which also help refugees find their way to employment through job shadowing, work placement, employer engagement, vocational language training and employability skills development.   |
|                   | Mobile app | Tarjemly                                  | Created by the developer of Gherbtana, Tarjemly is an app that connects the user with a translator who is able to provide live, on the spot, verbal translation services. The app can also be used to translate SMS. Available in Turkish, Arabic and English, users simply create an account and make an online payment (costs start at \$14.99). The app has just under 30,000 users and is being financed by Syrian investors. The founder hopes to expand the user base in the future to include tourists, and to incorporate more languages. |

**Table 2: Relevant projects**

|              |            |                 |  |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|--|
| Facilitators | Mobile app | Hello Hope      | The mobile network company Turkcell developed the application 'Hello Hope' and launched the app in the Turkish Red Crescent Istanbul Sultanbeyli Community Center that offers psychosocial, referral, education and protection services to Syrians. The app offers the opportunity to learn the local language, and access practical information such as how to access health services, how to register with public and social services, nearest service points, etc. Moreover, users can call Turkcell's Arabic call centre if they face any problems.  |
|              | Mobile app | Gherbetna*      | Gherbtina was founded by a computer programmer who is himself a Syrian refugee. The app offers newly arrived refugees help in four critical areas: Information relating to asylum procedures and broadcast via infographics and animation; News; Opportunities, which advertises apartments and jobs legally suitable for refugees; and Help Me, where refugees can ask questions about health, education and other legal services. Plans for further development and expansion, including partnerships with key Turkish companies, are under discussion.  |
|              | SMS        | Souktel         | Users send their questions to the system via SMS, and backroom systems identify, analyse and sort the incoming queries so they can reach a lawyer with the right expertise to respond. The content is translated into Turkish, for the local lawyers to answer, and the lawyers' answer then get translated back into Arabic and is uploaded onto the mobile of the refugee. The project is staffed by people with a humanitarian background who understand the issues faced by refugees, as well as technical specialists and lawyers. Souktel reported more than 30,000 people using the service within the first three weeks and total traffic has now passed more than 200,000 messages. |
|              | Website    | Crisis info Hub | Crisis Info Hub project for refugees arriving in Europe, <a href="http://refugeeinfo.eu">refugeeinfo.eu</a> , which offers basic information on registration processes, transport, medical care and accommodation, and other topics. Led by Mercy Corps and International Rescue Committee (IRC), the project has had substantial support from Google.org, which provided much of the technical development capacity.  |

**Table 2: Relevant projects**

|                   |            |                 |  |
|-------------------|------------|-----------------|--|
| Facilitators      | Platform   | Harabik         | Platform that provides practical information and orientation to Arabic-speaking individuals in the country.  |
| Means and markers | Platform   | Taalum*         | Platform affiliated to the Syrian Economic Forum, training refugees on entrepreneurial skills and offering them networking opportunities.  |
|                   | Mobile app | Step-Up         | The app aims to support Syrians in finding work opportunities relevant to their education and experience, while also encouraging employers across the region to hire skilled Syrian candidates in their organisations. It also provides interview, CV and cover letter writing tips in addition to a resume builder and a chance for candidates to create a video of themselves to further persuade employers to hire them. In addition, DRC StepUp provides legal updates regarding the new laws and work regulation both for employers and candidates specifically for each country in MENA. |
|                   | Website    | Laser           | This EU-sponsored three-year project provided language and academic skills to Syrian refugee youth living in host countries.   |
|                   | Website    | LEARN Programme | The flexible design of the project enables it to reach vulnerable adolescents who are otherwise unable to engage in formal or non-formal education. Tablets can be used offline and in the student's own time, which is necessary to meet their scheduling needs and frequent lack of access to internet. After two cohorts of the LEARN project, endline data and assessments show that learners made significant gains in mathematics, English, Arabic and Turkish.  |
|                   | Website    | Project Hope    | Through an adaptive learning technology platform and a digital game, the aim of the project was to improve Turkish language proficiency, expand executive functions and introduce coding skills among child refugees. The New York University together with the City University of New York and Turkey's Bahcesehir University, conducted a study on the project, whose findings were presented to a special meeting at BAU International University in Washington, D.C. in June 2017.   |

**Table 2: Relevant projects**

|                           |               |  |  |
|---------------------------|---------------|--|--|
| Means and markers         | Website       | HOPES (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians)* | This project is funded by the European Union's Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis, 'the Madad Fund' and implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) together with the British Council, Campus France and Nuffic. The life span of the project will be from April 2016 until November 2019. The attending institutions are: Istanbul Aydin University, Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation                             |
| <b>Turkey and Lebanon</b> |               |  |  |
| Means and markers         | Website       | HEEAP (Higher Education English Access Programme)                                | The project includes 100-hour face-to-face English classes and an online course provided for free at universities for Syrians and local students. A teachers training is provided by the British Council. Through call for proposals, universities, local public administrations and local NGOs receive funding for trainings and equipment, to improve their capacity to cope with the needs of Syrian refugees as well as host communities, in higher education. |
|                           | Miscellaneous | Qudra  | Online platform aimed at expanding and improving basic vocational skills for host communities and Syrian refugees, in particular youth and women. Several activities, such as face-to-face labs, workshops and expert meetings are used to promote interactive knowledge sharing, best practices exchange and collaborative learning through a participatory approach.   |





